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Articulāte Vol. XVI

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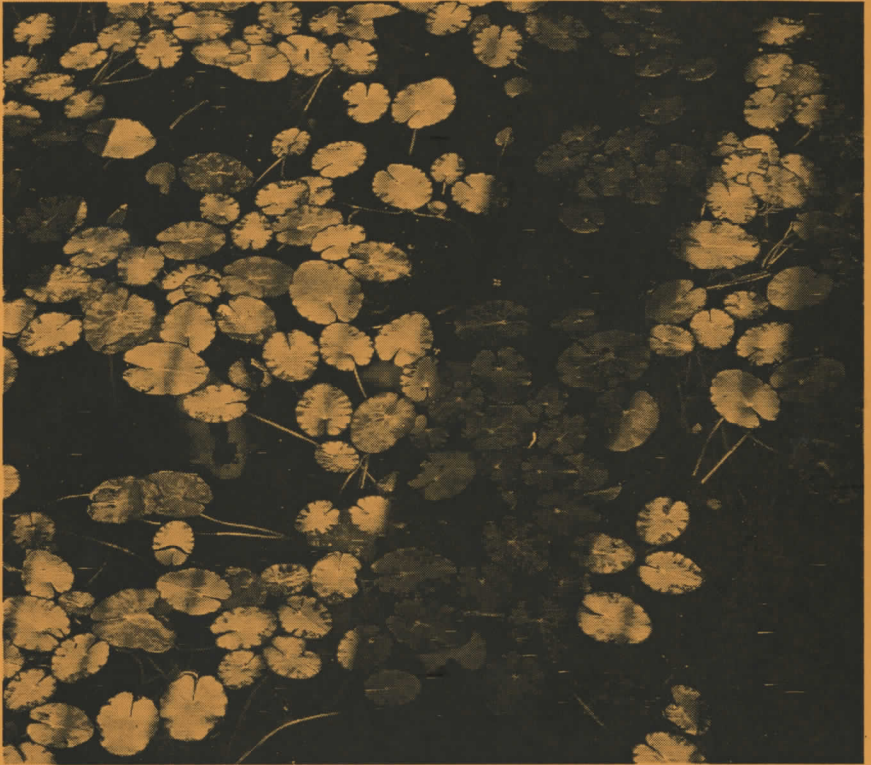
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Volume XVI-2011

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Articulāte is published in the spring semester of each academic year and features student essays of literary and cultural criticism. *Articulāte* will consider papers written by Denison undergraduates in any area of literary and cultural criticism and from any department or discipline.

Faculty members are encouraged to recommend particularly strong essays from their classes for publication in *Articulāte*. As a special feature, *Articulāte* publishes each year's winner of the Robert T. Wilson Award for Scholarly Writing.

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Meeting Apart and the Togethercolored Instant: Typography and Communion in Dickinson and Cummings *Kate Morley '11*

Emily Dickinson and E. E. Cummings both deviate substantially from normative typography throughout their respective bodies of work, but their preferred ways of straying from those norms could not be more dissimilar. Dickinson uses punctuation to expand the spaces around her words; Cummings uses words to collapse the spaces around his punctuation. Dickinson adds unexpected capitalizations; Cummings erases expected ones. Yet for all their differences, both artists' patterns of typographical deviation do share one feature: Each enhances its respective creator's arguments about the conditions under which interpersonal communion becomes possible.

In the early stages of the field's development, literary semiotics focused primarily on the sign systems created by textual content; most theorists ignored typography in favor of studying syntax, tropes, and narrative structures (Bressler 111-14). In recent years, however, an increasing number of scholars have turned their attention to the idea that the physical arrangement and appearance of written language functions as its own sign system, one that plays a part "in making a text not only visible but meaningful" (Gutjahr and Benton 2). The theory rests on the premise that "[o]nce given visual form, any text is implicitly coded by that form in ways that signal, however subtly, its nature and purpose" (6). In more extreme versions of this view, every typographical feature imaginable has its potential significance, from the relative letter shapes of different fonts to the decision to indent a line of poetry; if it exists, it matters (Gutjahr and Benton 7; Miller 204).

Cummings scholars are nearly unanimous in their acceptance of typographical semiology as a both plausible and valuable tool for approaching the poet's work; it is now something of a critical commonplace to say that "[t]he words [in his poetry] are not only linguistic signs... but mainly graphic signifiers" (Lapacherie 60). In fact, this view is so prevalent that it appears as a stock side-note even in studies devoted principally to other aspects of the poet's work. For example, Irene R. Fairley's analysis of Cummings' syntax includes a brief reference to the importance of "the spatial distribution of... words on the page" in "expand[ing] the possible dimensions of statement and meaning" of Cumming's poetry (13). Even those skeptical of the theory's usefulness for interpreting literature in general acknowledge that in Cummings' case, the "poems would indeed lose major elements... if printed differently" (Miller 222).

Dickinson's critics, however, are less united on the relevance of her typography. Some present her formatting as crucial to understanding her content, as in Heather McHugh's claim that Dickinson's preference for the

dash over other forms of punctuation is responsible for much of the interpretive “fluidity” of her poems (108). A few scholars, carrying their support of this argument to its logical extreme, mark typography as so important in determining her poetry’s meaning that even things like “the number of folds” in Dickinson’s original fascicles or the “slant” of her handwriting on a certain line have indispensable value (Miller 204-5). Others, like Cristanne Miller, call for a reduced emphasis on the appearance of Dickinson’s texts, protesting that Dickinson did not “[conceive] of poetry... as significantly visual in its forms” and thus “did not write poetry for the page in the same sense that [C]ummings did” (221-2). Miller argues that no matter how stylistically idiosyncratic and rebellious Dickinson might be, as a member of a “nineteenth-century... culture more attuned to structures of sound than sight in poetry,” her rebellion would have been directed against “aural” norms and not visual ones (205-6). Yet even Miller includes one typographical element in her list of those “irregularities” of Dickinson’s she considers worth analyzing: her punctuation (226-7). Any alteration made to normative punctuation changes the ways in which the words on a page relate to one another, and this in turn affects—or at the very least reflects—the ways that the concepts expressed in those words relate to one another.

In Dickinson and Cummings’ work, this mirroring of punctuation and content is at its most interesting in the context of the poets’ depictions of interpersonal connection. “Connection,” in its broadest sense, encompasses an almost unlimited variety of interactions between people, and Dickinson and Cummings write about nearly all of them. For the sake of the current argument, I will limit my discussion to representations of a state of communion between two individuals, a *sharing* of the innermost self. This “sharing” takes two different forms. In the first, both partners actually feel the same emotions or think the same thoughts. In the second, mutuality of experience is not required; one partner simply grants the other *knowledge* of the content of his or her inner world. Both poets write frequently of such communion, but each portrays it as occurring under very different circumstances.

In Dickinson’s case, emotional and psychological closeness usually takes place across some sort of literal or metaphorical distance. The relationship between intimate revelation and withdrawal into death in the poem “I like a look of Agony” offers a relatively straightforward example of this pattern. Here, the speaker prefers the titular “look of Agony” because, as something “[i]mpossible to feign,” it is one of the few displays of emotion that an outside observer can ever “know [is] true” (Dickinson, “Agony” lines 2-5). But it takes a specific intensity of “Agony” to produce such unquestionable evidence of another person’s feelings: the pain felt at the moment when “[t]he eyes glaze once – and that is Death” (5). In order for the observer to truly know the sufferer, the latter has to die; the two must undergo a separation that will endure for as long as the former remains alive.

Even the word “glaze” connotes physical division in a way that alternatives like “dim” or “darken” or “dull” would not. The two other verb-form meanings of “glaze,” to coat pottery or to mount glass panes into a window frame, both entail the construction of a barrier. The dying expose themselves, then promptly withdraw beyond their companions’ reach. Tellingly, the most revealing aspect of the agonized expression, the part that is singled out as truly “Impossible to feign” (with “Impossible” emphatically capitalized), are the “Beads” left “upon the Forehead” by the exertion of the death throes—and these appear in the poem only *after* the sufferer has already died (6-7). The moment of communion arises out of the moment of separation itself.

This idea that connection and separation arise from the same circumstances, or even serve as the circumstances that produce each another, persists throughout much of Dickinson’s poetry, and her heavy use of dashes creates a typographical reflection of that concept. Out of all the punctuation marks available to an English-language writer, the dash imposes the greatest amount of physical space between words. “I like a look of Agony” contains relatively few dashes for a Dickinson poem. However, the positioning of those dashes that *do* appear in it provides an example of the way in which Dickinson’s use of expanded page space interacts with the content of her poems. Three of the four dashes fall at the end of a line (more specifically, at the ends of lines 2, 4, and 5). Since the words they come between are already sundered by line breaks and not placed next to one another on the page, the contribution these dashes make to the poem’s spacing is minimal. This makes the poem’s single mid-line dash all the more visually striking in its isolation, calling our attention to the place where it occurs: “The eyes glaze once – and that is Death” (5). The dash falls at the precise point in the poem when distance first interposes itself between the speaker and the sufferer, in the tiny space between the moment when the body shuts down and the moment when the deathbed watchers realize that the self inside that body is gone. At least on the level of the printed page, that dash grants external, physical expression to the opening of an internal, intangible gap.

From here until the period that closes the poem, the remaining lines continue without the interruption of a single mark of punctuation: “Impossible to feign / The Beads upon the Forehead / By homely Anguish strung” (Dickinson, “Agony” 6-8). The poem’s most fragmented line is thus directly juxtaposed with its least fragmented ones. Each of the five lines preceding this section ends with either a dash or a comma; none of them are allowed to flow into the following line without some sort of typographically mandated pause. The contrasting ease of connection between the words of the final lines is fitting, since the “Beads” of sweat they describe are the indicator that allows the speaker to know the other person’s emotional experience. The visual appearance of the lines thus reflects their content.

This interplay between punctuation and meaning becomes more pronounced in the closing stanza of “I cannot live with You.” Having

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This interplay between punctuation and meaning becomes more pronounced in the closing stanza of “I cannot live with You.” Having

detailed all of the reasons why she¹ cannot be with her beloved in life, in death, or even in the afterlife, the speaker now explains the one form of connection still open to them:

So we must meet apart –
You there – I – here –
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are – and Prayer –
And that White Sustenance –

Despair – . (Dickinson, “I cannot” lines 45-50)

Just as it was in “I like a look of Agony,” the first function of the dash in this section is to give the lovers’ impending separation a physical equivalent on the page. The speaker tries to define the nature of the distance she and her would-be partner will have to keep from each other, and the line in which she begins to do so, “[y]ou there – I – here,” is broken into three segments by two different dashes (46). This makes it something of an oddity within the text. Out of the fifty lines in this poem, thirty-five are written as unfragmented blocks of words, their dashes deferred to the end. Out of the fifteen lines chopped by mid-line dashes, thirteen bear only one internal dash, limiting them to only two fragmented parts apiece. But here, as the speaker shifts from outlining the lives she and her lover will never share together to describing the life that they will have to endure apart, a line finally splits into more than two sections. The abrupt increase in the concentration of dashes expands the line to an almost excessive degree, intensifying the reader’s perception of the distance unfurling between the beloved’s “there” and the speaker’s “here.” The dashes’ visual doubling of the poem’s action continues in their isolation of the “I.” The dashes cut it off from direct contact with either “there” or “here,” leaving both the word and the self it represents hovering between them. She cannot and will not live with the person she addresses, but she will never fully belong to her own home, either; her perpetual yearning for the beloved, her efforts to “meet apart” with him in her mind, will keep her stranded between the two locations.

One other word in this stanza is likewise rendered solitary by a set of framing dashes: “Despair” (Dickinson, “I cannot” 50). The speaker identifies this “Despair” as one of the things that stands as a “Door ajar” between her and her beloved, implying that they will be able to “meet apart” across all those “Oceans” worth of separating space via sharing the same intense emotion (47-50). The knowledge that the other person is

1. In most of the poems I discuss in this paper, there is little textual basis for assigning a gender to the speaker. However, for the sake of avoiding the awkward constructions of “he or she” and “his or her” or perpetually having to repeat the epithet “the speaker,” I will refer to Dickinson’s unnamed speakers as “she” and Cummings’ unnamed speakers as “he.” This is not meant to suggest that either Dickinson or Cummings never wrote from the perspective of the other gender; it is simply an attempt to reduce verbal clutter without automatically defaulting to “he.”

experiencing it too transforms their suffering into a way of maintaining spiritual contact, and thus into “Sustenance” (49). But the word “Despair” is situated between twin dashes, the visual representations of distance, and their presence reminds us that the thing unifying the couple, the actual *feeling* of despair, is a *part* of the very distance that it is supposed to overcome. The bonding agent of the lovers’ mutual pain only exists because they have been forced from each other’s presence; their method of reconnection is made possible by the same circumstances that render it necessary. Here, as in “I like a look of Agony,” communion is dependent upon separation, and that conceptual relationship is conveyed as much by the arrangement of dashes as it is by the words themselves.

Unlike the previous poems, “How sick – to wait – in any place – but thine” does not trace the process by which distance enables connection; rather, it simply chronicles the speaker’s rejection of connection with anyone other than one person from whom she currently happens to be distant. She rebuffs an unidentified “some one[’s]” attempt to “twine” with her, preferring to reserve “[t]hat right” for her absent inamorato (Dickinson “How sick,” 2-6). While the twining proposed by the other person may very well be that of sex or matrimony, it is equally easy to read it as an offer of genuine communion. The would-be companion approaches the speaker because the latter “look[s] tired – or alone – / Or breaking – almost – with unspoken pain” (3-4). The proposal to “twine” may thus be an offer of empathy in exchange for confession, motivated by the asker’s desire to know the private causes of these “unspoken” sufferings. When the speaker rejects this opportunity for intimacy, two dashes mimic her self-isolating gesture: “And I turned – ducal – ” (5). The word she uses to describe her new, aloof identity stands removed, as segregated from its fellows as the “ducal” speaker is from hers. The opening line makes similar use of the dash as a visual metaphor, chopping apart the speaker’s realization of “[h]ow sick [it is] – to wait – in any place – but thine” with three different mid-line breaks (1). This radical expansion of page space heightens the sense of distance between the speaker and the object of her yearning, thereby intensifying the reader’s understanding of just “[h]ow sick” the separation feels.

We can see these resonances between Dickinson’s punctuation and her thematics easily enough by studying her work in isolation, without any comparison to other practitioners of this kind of typographical manipulation. Nevertheless, knowing how a certain technique operates across the work of many different artists can greatly enhance our appreciation of the way it operates in the work of any given individual. If Dickinson’s particular ways of abandoning conventional formatting contribute to the presence of certain interpretive possibilities within her poetry, then another poet’s very different ways of abandoning those same conventions ought to generate an equally different set of available interpretations. Cummings, whose approach to typography and ideas about communion are both in opposition to Dickinson’s, is an ideal choice for such a comparison.

Unlike Dickinson, Cummings roots acts of mental and emotional communion in moments of actual *physical* connection, from the “togethercoloured instant” of lovemaking to the simple brush of arm against arm (“sometimes” line 7). In his treatment of romantic love, Cummings is nothing if not a poet of the body, displaying “a completely physical approach to love” in which sexual “attraction [is what] creates depth of feeling” (Attaway 15). Across poem after poem after poem, Cummings links the sharing of the inner life with touch. In “it is so long since my heart has been with yours,” for example, the “heart[s]” of the title line are able to join because they are “shut within” the space created by the lovers’ “mingling arms” (Cummings lines 1-2). Elsewhere, the beloved’s “mind [walks] into [the speaker’s] kiss” (5-6). This identification of kisses as a site for the transfusion and sharing of selves continues in “silently if, out of not knowable,” where the speaker tells his lover that during “your kiss / losing through you what seemed myself, i find / selves unimaginably mine” (8-10). The body becomes the primary medium through which one person can access and know another’s soul. One of Cummings’ more frequently deployed forms of typographical deviation, the collapsing of space around a punctuation mark so that it becomes the only thing separating two words, functions as a visual literalization of this touch-based communion. The words, like the minds and souls they describe, flow into one another through the act of touching the same “body.”

This linking of punctuation and message is evident throughout much of Cummings’ work. For example, in his erotic poem “sometimes i am alive because with,” the “togethercoloured instant” of sexual union takes place at “the moment... / when, her mouth suddenly rising, wholly / [she] begins with mine fiercely to fool” (Cummings lines 7-10). Awarding the title “togethercoloured” to sex suggests an expectation of gaining more than just physical pleasure from the act; the speaker’s goal is to experience a sense of intimate connection with his partner. Accordingly, in the line where the intercourse first begins, the written words begin to meld together. Twice in the same line, the traditionally expected spaces do not appear between a comma and the word following it. It is the only part of the poem in which this space-free punctuation appears; at the moment when the lovers are closest, so are the words.

Cummings employs a similar typographical strategy in his less sexual love poems as well, hoarding his irregularities of punctuation until the one key moment of connection. The relatively chaste “since feeling is first” makes a particularly fitting subject for a typographical study, as its claim that “life’s not a paragraph / and death... is no parenthesis” gives explicit voice to the idea that the physical form of written language can serve as an equivalent for real-world concepts (Cummings lines 15-16). Cummings maintains normative spacing around his punctuation marks in all but two of the poem’s lines. This distance finally vanishes when the speaker witnesses his lover’s “eyelids’ flutter which says / we are for each other: then /

laugh, leaning back in my arms” (12-14). The compression of the colon and comma unites three separate actions. The first, the flicker of the eyelids, serves as a form of communication, a way for the “lady” to share the knowledge of what she is feeling with her lover (10). Afterwards she “laughs,” expressing her pleasure, then immediately “lean[s]” against the speaker’s body, reestablishing the physical aspect of her relationship with him. The deliberate erasure of space around the two punctuation marks fuses the moment of communion, the moment of joy in that communion, and the moment of physical connection into a single unit on the page, providing yet another visual correlate for Cummings’ insistent equation of the bodily contact with spiritual contact.

In the poem “look,” Cummings’ manipulation of typography becomes somewhat more elaborate. The entire poem builds towards the speaker’s realization that he and his lover have undergone a mingling of selves. After running through a list of all the parts of his body that he can no longer “recognize” as being purely “[him]self” anymore, he acknowledges that these changes stem from the transfusion of identity he received from his lover:

someone whom you love

.....

myself has entered and become such

lips as i use to talk with,

a new person is alive and

gestures with my

or it is perhaps you who

with my voice

are

playing. (Cummings, “look” 18-19, 23-33)

The “new person” residing inside the speaker takes the form of both “someone whom [his beloved] loves” and the beloved herself (or himself); he has actually absorbed elements of his lover’s personality and incorporated them into his own. The figure of “someone whom you love” represents the speaker’s understanding of the qualities his lover most desires to find in other people, and as such, is more an extension of the lover’s own selfhood than a separate entity. Thus, in order for this intertwining of selves to have taken place, the speaker must be aware of at least some of the private desires and hopes and needs of his partner; otherwise, the “you” of the poem could not truly be the one slipping inside the speaker and “playing” with his “voice” (30-33). The intimacy of the knowledge required here, and the speaker’s ability to adopt and experience parts of his lover’s inner world as his own, marks the fusion of selves presented here as an act of communion.

The speaker delays any overt mention of these changes to the internal self until the second half of the poem. Meanwhile, he devotes the first half to a brief catalogue of the parts of his *physical* self that “are different / from what they were” (Cummings, “look” 11-12). These are the

places where the shifting of his identity first becomes apparent, and all of them—his “fingers” (2), “hands” (7), “wrists” (7), and “arms” (12)—are instruments of touch, thus reconfirming bodily contact as the site of internal transformation for Cummings. Each time the speaker mentions a new body part, Cummings deletes the space around a single punctuation mark within that phrase. As it progresses, this sequence of typographical deviations gradually comes to reflect more and more of the poem’s ideas about the body’s relation to the self.

The catalogue begins with the speaker’s “fingers, which / touched [his lover]” and now no longer “resemble” themselves (Cummings, “look” 2-3, 6). The condensed spacing operates very simply here. The elision of the expected gap between the “fingers” and the word nearest to them allows those fingers to do on the page what they do in life: touch. This particular typographical gesture does little else to shape the interpretive possibilities of the line, perhaps because at this point the body the speaker caresses is still just a body. The reaching fingers feel only the lover’s “warmth and crisp / littleness,” and while “warmth” can describe personality as well as physicality, the poem offers little compelling evidence that the speaker means the term any way other than literally (4-5).

During his next observation of how touching her has altered him, however, the speaker acknowledges the personhood of his lover’s body:

My wrists [and] hands
which held carefully the soft silence
of you (and your body
smile eyes feet hands)
are different

from what they were. (Cummings, “look” 7-12)

Coming from Cummings, the separation of “your body” from “you” here is a surprising gesture, implying a division between soul and flesh not elsewhere present in his poetry. Were the formatting of the punctuation normal, the relegation of the body to a parenthetical clause might make it seem like an afterthought, the incidental casing of a personhood deemed to be separate from it. In Cummings’ hands, however, the content of the parenthetical clause and the abnormal spacing around that first parenthesis work together to prevent that reading. The most striking feature of the list of the body’s attributes (“smile eyes feet hands”) is that it includes the “smile” as something that the speaker can hold when he embraces his lover’s form (10). Not the lips, not the mouth, but the actual facial expression itself, and by extension, the emotions that produced it. This idea that one can hold another person’s “smile” in one’s arms thus parallels an idea expressed in the earlier “you” section, that one can hold not just a silent body but, through it, the “soft silence” of the personality itself (8-10). Such paralleling resituates the body in the realm of personhood originally granted to the internal “you” alone. The moment in which the passage finally breaks punctuation convention works in conjunction with this verbal content to reunite the

“you” of the self with its “body.” Rather than being divisive, the opening parenthesis actually brings the two closer together than an unpunctuated but regularly spaced line could have, allowing “you” and the first word of the phrase “and your body” to bleed together into what is, visually, a single unit of text. This time it is not the speaker and lover who touch across the modified punctuation; it is the body and the soul. This moment, and the typography that produces it, serve as the conceptual stepping-stone between the speaker’s earlier touching of only the physical properties of his lover’s body and his later claim that “all of [his lover] lay folded” in his “arms” (12-13, emphasis mine). In turn, that shift from feeling only the “warmth and... / littleness” of a body to recognizing that by holding it, one holds “all” of a person is what allows the commingling of selves to take place during the latter half of the poem (5-6, 13). Thus, by contributing to the argument that the body is a viable medium for self-to-self communion, the unusual formatting of the punctuation plays a valuable role in conveying the poem’s message.

Critics sometimes accuse Cummings of stylistic carelessness. Some dismiss his experiments with form and format as little more than a collection of flashy stunts, selected at random for the sake of drawing attention. To them, “grammatical or typographical contortion are not in Cummings the outward sign of complex thought that they are in [other poets]” (Dougherty 184). But as my examination of three of his communion poems hopefully indicates, Cummings’ use of non-normative punctuation is anything but sloppy. The specific placements of his typographical deviations mirror and play off of the action depicted in the language they shape.

When a writer capitalizes a proper noun, or ends a sentence with a period, or places one space between typed words rather than two or five or none, it is not because this is just the way text naturally happens to fall on a page; it is because the writer chooses to do so. That decision may be subconscious or ingrained to the point of reflex, but it is still a *choice*, and the individual makes it for a reason: because each of these typographical features carries information about the text they shape. Yet like any sign system whose norms of usage are so widely practiced that observing them no longer requires conscious effort, typography easily becomes invisible as a bearer of meaning. Sometimes we need an encounter with someone who creates meaning by dramatically breaking the system’s rules to remind us that it can serve as a sign system at all. If seeing a sentence end with an ellipsis or a dash can startle a reader into wondering how that impacts the potential readings, perhaps it can also make the reader realize that the period that could have ended that sentence would have imposed its own range of possible meanings and tones and subtexts. Thus, Dickinson and Cummings’ use of typographical deviations as reflections of their poetic content does more than simply reinforce the themes and ideas at play in their own individual bodies of work. It allows the reader to rediscover typography’s ability to serve as a legitimate medium of communication. For all their

differences, the sprawling dashes and cramped commas ultimately speak the same truth: No aspect of written language is meaningless.

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Introduction:

Dystopian fiction explores the potential of certain ideological aspects in a present society to devolve into a state that is in some regard politically, socially, and/or economically detrimental to its citizens—either overtly or covertly. As rhetorical critics Bullen and Parsons argue, dystopian invention is “not a vision of a possible future, but an interrogation of the present” (128). The issues deliberated in the imaginary futuristic setting of a dystopian text are then manifestations of concerns contemporary to the author’s creation of that dystopia. Dystopian fiction provides an imaginary space where the contingent future can be contemplated, where possible trajectories deriving from the uncertainties of the present can be followed to their hypothetical outcome.

Because children are the nascent embodiment of future popular culture, when dystopian narratives are written for the child or young adult audience, the subtext takes on a pedagogical quality. An inductive analysis of a work of children’s dystopian fiction reveals the concerns pervading the ideology of the adult subculture its author represents. Children’s literature is illustrative of the general adult attitude towards how certain litigious issues should be managed. Adolescent generations herald the impending ideological climate, and form the axis for the future condition of the world. Bullen and Parsons state that “in the popular imagination [children] are the impetus for social change” (127). Each generation is then burdened with both hopes that it will be the one that redeems the world and humanity’s suffering, and fears that it will increase the stagnancy of ideology because of apathy and conformity. The protagonists of most children’s dystopian fiction suggest a hopeful conception of the child-subject’s beneficial potential. As the young hero comes of age, he or she also attains autonomy and the daring to take political action that dissents from the status quo. Their agency enables them to stand in opposition to the authority and majority in their community and exercise democratic engagement. This empowered self-awareness allows them to take radical action to restore their society. In my rhetorical analysis I seek to discern the pedagogical interaction that Lowry facilitates between adult ideology and the adolescent audience and the model for political action against unethical government and society that the adult ideology endorses.

Lois Lowry’s dystopian children’s novel, *The Giver*, was published in the US in 1993. It is one of the most “challenged” (petitioned to be removed from a school library) novels in schools across the US (American Library Association). The cultural environment of the early 1990s was turbulent. The forefront of the decade witnessed the Gulf War, the culmination of South Africa under apartheid, and public access to the World Wide Web (The People

History). The 1990s was characterized by the continuing development of the Postmodern era, which embraced relativism and, as Fredric Jameson writes in his 1991 book, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, “a new depthlessness” (6). Literary critic Roberta Trites states that the young adult genre of literature “has emerged as an aspect of postmodernism... [and] depict[s] some postmodern tension between individuals and institutions” (Hintz 52). Lowry invokes this tension in her work, and narratively eulogizes the youth who develops his individuality in opposition to institutional and ideological control.

Literature Review

The concept of dystopia is best understood by exploring the concept of utopia from which it arose. The literal translation for “utopia” in Greek is “nowhere” (North 7). The term was first and most famously used in its traditional definition by Thomas More in his fictional work, *Utopia*, as the name of the imaginary island where his conception of the ideal commonwealth was located (7). The majority of utopian societies, including Thomas More’s, have their origins in the classical or Christian traditions (Kumar 19, 100). Plato’s *Republic*, Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, Virgil’s fourth *Eclogue*, and book one of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* are among the classical ancestors to the modern utopia. The Christian models of the Garden of Eden and Heaven are utopian in essence (Kumar 3, 5). Both scholarly and fantastical theories relating the political, social, and economic dimensions that would create a perfect society abound throughout history. Each instance of utopia has the claim to relevance in regard to the culture and time period in which it was imagined. George Orwell, an author of dystopia, commented that “the dream of a just society...seems to haunt the human imagination ineradicably and in all ages, whether it is called the Kingdom of Heaven or the classless society, or whether it is thought of as a Golden Age which once existed in the past and from which we have degenerated” (2).

The utopian narrative develops its form and content out of its contemporaneous reality (32). These theories, however, are by nature unfeasible in the real world. However, despite their impracticality, David Plath observes that “men everywhere seem addicted to visions of ideal otherness” (Kumar 19). Frederic Jameson hypothesizes that individuals cling to utopias out a dissatisfaction with some or many aspects of the present and a yearning for cultural change. He asserts that “[t]he utopian idea...keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is” (as quoted in Booker, “Dystopian Impulse” 3). The premises of utopian invention are rooted in the sociopolitical climate of the time period when it is composed and are deeply invested in the issues being debated. Jameson continues, stating, “a utopian notion of a desirable alternative future is necessary to empower meaningful political action in the present” (3). Whether intentionally or not, utopias contain some kind of subtextual commentary on the state of current society.

The Twentieth-Century Dystopia

The twentieth century dystopia as it is epitomized in literary works such as Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* indicate

a shift in the evaluation of the utopia as not merely improbable but undesirable. Dystopian invention began to signify a fear “that utopia *can* be attained, and that it will be a nightmare. It is not...that humans are too vicious or too stupid to create a perfect society, but that such an achievement would violate the restlessness and striving that are an essential part of the human spirit” (Kumar 102). Perfection is unnatural and thus utopia would somehow render humankind inhuman. Scholars attribute the flourishing dystopian genre in the twentieth century to the two occasions of gruesome, protracted world wars, witnessing the atrocities of totalitarian Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, and the horrors of nuclear holocaust (Booker, “Dystopian Impulse” 17). Observing the damaging effects of implementing the ideal communist model in the real-world society of the Soviet Union deterred any utopian experiments with communism. In fact, all utopian writing declined in concurrence with the increase in dystopian literature (Kumar 420). These weighty events were stark proof of the devastation that can result from unchallenged authority in any form. In effect, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia were the actualizations of theoretical dystopias; these realities “lend a poignancy and an urgency to the warnings of dystopian fiction” (20).

Many twentieth century dystopian novels portrayed the problems that would develop if socialism were to be applied to real, flawed humans always motivated by their own subconscious selfish desires (Kumar 133). George Orwell’s famous novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published in 1949 amidst the tense atmosphere that pervaded the beginning of the Cold War (289). The author drew directly from the examples of Soviet Union communism and German Nazism (307). The text expresses a cynicism with regard to not only the brand of socialism manifest in Stalinism but any socialist society—Orwell made his fiction a cautionary tale and a prophecy of what would come if individuals did nothing to participate in a political way to prevent society’s present trajectory from reaching its culmination (289, 295). His work is a satire of the kind of utopia Thomas More dreamed of, where egalitarianism would lead to prosperity and “all have an equal voice... and no distinctions of rank or privilege are recognized...[where] there is a community of work...[and all] have an obligation to labour...” (27). Orwell said of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: *Don’t let it happen. It depends on you*” (291).

Orwell’s achieved the desired impact of his dystopian work by portraying the relevant 1940s world in a deteriorated state. The fictional world was not unrecognizable, and the reminiscent setting formed a bridge to convey the urgency Orwell intended (296-297). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* exemplifies the principal dystopian literary technique of defamiliarization. “By focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematical social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable” (Booker, “Dystopian Literature” 3-4). Literary language, especially in fiction, makes ideology within that language apparent that would be covert in the discourse of the contemporary culture (16). Dystopian literature more than any other genre

imparts a realization of ideology by narratively unmasking and portraying how it violates individuals in a community. By demonstrating the potential damaging effects of applied utopian principles as an uncritical culture might conceive of them, dystopias stand as a critique of existing sociopolitical conditions. Dystopian fiction criticizes the ideologically endorsed social and political systems “through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions” (Booker, “Dystopian Literature” 3, Kumar 126).

Dystopia as Social Criticism

Dystopian literature resembles cultural criticism in that they both respond to the atmosphere of uncertainty and crisis of present society (Booker “Dystopian Literature” 4). “Literary works that critically examine both existing conditions and the potential abuses that might result from the institution of supposedly utopian alternatives can be seen as the epitome of literature in its role as social criticism” (3). Dystopian fiction’s emphasis on social and political critique makes the genre “more like the projects of social and cultural critics: Nietzsche, Freud...Foucault, Althusser, and many others” rather than escapist science fiction (4). Politics is an inherent aspect to the dystopian story since it is so integral to any conceptualization of a future society. Simultaneously, politics is arguably dystopian in nature because it is “the art of imagining and implementing or avoiding a certain future, while political processes easily turn uplifting futuristic expectations into dystopian threats” (Klaic 95).

Althusser posits that there is blurring of the boundary between dystopian fiction and social criticism (Booker, “Dystopian Literature” 16). Althusser brings this interaction between dystopias, politics, and society to bear in his theories about populaces being subject to an insidious ideology that escapes their perception. He discusses the antagonistic interaction between individual self-definition and popular society; this subject is frequently examined in dystopian literature (15). Foucault’s critiques of his society resonate with the subtextual social commentary in dystopian fiction, specifically the concepts of surveillance in the Panopticon model and the covert power of language in “the way we think, and...the way we *are* (23-26, 19). The similarities between the subtexts of dystopian literature and the analyses of these important scholars points to the value of the genre as social criticism.

Postmodernism

The social criticism to which both Althusser and Foucault’s theories and *The Giver* pertain is situated in Postmodernism—the ideological classification that accounts for the trends in late twentieth and early twenty-first century worldviews. Postmodernism emerges in dystopian literature in its concern with language as constitutive of reality and charged by ideology. The concept of constitutive communication as it is explored by Postmodern intellectuals “contend[s] that objects, events, processes can only exist for humans once they come under the linguistic sign; they are meaningless until they are conceptualized” (Thompson 2). Postmodernists distrust politics and community because of the gravity of their potential negative effects and the insidious way in

which those effects are generally achieved (Siebers 31). Additionally, Postmodernism and the characteristic dystopian literature engage with the theory of the "increasing subjection of humanity to...alienation and the loss of individuality...intertwined with a process of cultural decline" (Thompson 17). The dystopia inverts the Postmodern idea of utopia, "where community is based on the inclusion of differences, where different forms of talk are allowed to exist simultaneously, and where heterogeneity does not inspire conflict" (Siebers 20).

The Young Adult Subgenre

Dystopian fiction for young adults has a hopeful, optimistic quality. Because impressionable adolescents contain the potential for change as they mature and inherit the world, dystopian novels written for this audience "take an activist stance" that is oriented by the possibility of a better future (Klaic 140). These dystopias, while illuminating the perils of utopias gone wrong, still allow for an aspiration to a "good" utopia (Siebers 15). The social criticism is not discouraged by present circumstances but driven by a confidence that change can be achieved by a revolution in youth. There has been a flood of dystopian fiction for young adults in recent decades. This not only indicates an anxiety in the cultural climate but is also an auxiliary to the recent rise of the young adult subgenre in the Postmodern age.

"Young adult" is a relatively new distinction in literature, having only recently been recognized as its own discrete literary category. This is a result of the fact that adolescence as a stage of life preceding adulthood and separate from childhood is also a fairly new concept in Western culture (Howe & Strauss 74-76, Hunt 5). The entire juvenile stage of life as an expression of revolt, contesting the principles inherited from their upbringing and experimenting with new, personal philosophy (Trupe 189). Youth is situated in a difficult stage in life where the individual is locked in two divergent roles and conflicting needs as they seek independence and free expression while also holding on to the parental foundation that initiated the identity-forming process (Trupe 169). Books, especially popular fiction, are a significant means of adolescent self-identification (Zipes 4, Younger 46-7, 54). Literature helps readers to create meaning in their lives and in the world; it helps them to digest the complexities of life and to confront the problems they face (Berensmeyer 635). For this reason, dystopian novels written for children have a hopefulness that adult forms tend to lack.

In the young adult stage of life, individuals conclude the most impressionable period of their development and their beliefs and attitudes concretize (Drumheller 50). Tangled in the clamor of hormones, emotions, and change of adolescence, exists the nascent future cultural identity and ideology (Serazio 7, 4). Adults conceive of the adolescent as a construction on which they can project their ideologies and influence the course of the future. However, young adult dystopian fiction like Lowry's *The Giver* opens up paths for resisting the insidious cultural dogma and for developing individual agency in midst of the pressures of ideology.

Rhetorical Analysis

In *The Giver*, Lowry introduces her readers to a society of extreme order and uniformity. The community the narrative is set in appears initially to be utopian, or at least predominantly innocuous—a world that is "orderly, disciplined...where nothing was unexpected. Or inconvenient. Or unusual...without color, pain, or past" (Lowry 165). The citizens are peaceful and efficient, dedicated to preserving the idyllic community. Obvious signs of degeneration like greed, inequality, poverty, or violence are not present in the traditional sense. Lowry has stated that "the book really does seduce the reader early on because it sounds like a neat way to live" (Hendershot 309). In the first half of the novel, Lowry is intentional about depicting the community as, at a superficial level, a viable alternative to the traditional organization of western culture. However, the uneasy narrative atmosphere is perceptible from page one. The nearly twelve-year-old protagonist, Jonas, expresses his "apprehension," the object of his anxiety left ambiguous as he digresses to a story occurring a year earlier when he had felt the similar but more intense feeling of fear (Lowry 1). Lowry allows Jonas's trepidation to color the reader's perception of the narrator's concurrent descriptions of the quiet, disciplined community. Later in the chapter, the reason for Jonas's anxiety is revealed to be an approaching ceremony where everyone in his age group graduates to adulthood and receives their job assignments, which they will hold for the rest of their productive lives, from the "Committee of Elders" (15).

The uneasiness with which the author opens the story prompts the reader to be attentive to what may be amiss behind the external harmony. It provokes the reader to look beyond the collected exterior to the questionable factors by which that harmony is achieved. The incomplete observation imparted to the reader by the third-person-limited point-of-view obliges her to experience the community through the lens of Jonas's perfunctory acceptance but with an interpretive distance that allows the insidious nature of the community's operations to become apparent. This invites in the reader's perspective a suspicion that facilitates a critical reading of the sociopolitical environment of the dystopia and draws attention to its more covert detriments.

Adult Authority and Ideology:

When Jonas shares his nervousness about the Ceremony with his family, they reassure him that the Committee always acts in the best interest of the community; Jonas's family, as well as the rest of the public, gives the Committee their unconditional trust (16). Jonas's parents regard the governing body of Elders with pious respect. The tone of their language when speaking of the Committee is reverent and credulous. His mother tells him, "'I think [serving on the Committee]'s the most important job in our community'" (17). For the Elders, she contradicts the community-endorsed doctrine that every job is equally important in its contribution to society. She speaks of them as if they are infallible and omniscient. The Elders engage in constant, discreet observation of the community's children throughout their education in order to discern their appropriate vocation (15); they indicate at the Ceremony that they have knowledge of even the most minor events in each individual's life, such as when

Jonas crushed his finger in a door the previous year (62). Speakers installed in every room in the community both provide a sense that there is no area beyond the reach of surveillance. The residents accept these conditions as benign because they are taught to believe that this intrusive omnipresence allows the Elders to best serve the community. Jonas's parents exhibit this unwavering confidence in the community leadership.

Through the adult characters in the dystopia, excluding the Giver himself, the author criticizes their unquestioning acquiescence of community authority. The adults mistakenly attribute the Elders with infallibility. Lowry portrays children as having a greater opportunity to escape indoctrination, should their socialization be interrupted, because in their youth they have not yet become completely programmed by ideology. Jonas's mother comments, in reference to the pills that all citizens take from the onset of puberty to suppress sexuality, that "it becomes routine; after a while you won't even pay much attention to it" (38). Lowry uses the pill as shorthand for ideology's insidious oppression, both in the dystopia and metaphorically in the contemporary world. The concretization in *The Giver* of an abstraction like ideology into the form of a pill makes it easier to identify as a negative entity to be challenged.

In their passivity, the majority of the citizens surrender to the Committee complete agency over their lives and esteem them with indiscriminate faith. They remain unperturbed in their ignorance of what "Release"—which is actually lethal injection administered to the elderly, criminals, and certain infants "labeled Inadequate"—entails (42). The public is told that Release is merely discharging an individual from the community to "Elsewhere," which no one within the isolated community has knowledge of. Nor do they seek that knowledge: " 'What happens when they make the actual release?' " Jonas asks an adult acquaintance; she shrugs and replies, " 'I don't know. I don't think anybody does, except the committee...but you should have seen his look. Pure happiness' " (32). The woman displays indifferent acceptance of her ignorance and sees only what the Committee wants her to see. The narrative pedagogically instructs the adolescent audience to protest such apathetic approval of concealed instruments of oppression in a democratic society by revealing its control over adults—and especially parents—who adolescents normally trust to act responsibly.

In Lowry's narrative, the adults form a disempowered body that is hopelessly inculcated, their natural conscience expunged by lifelong conditioning. This leaves the adolescent protagonist and the young readers who journey with him to trust in themselves and appeal to their own reserves of initiative without the support of traditional adult figures. Lowry is promoting in youth an inwardly driven political action, as opposed to deferring action to adults endowed with authority by the same broken system that needs to be confronted. Due to the impressionability inherent to their inexperience, adolescents can be more readily converted to a doctrine than those older and more fixed in mindset; in the same attitude, adolescents possess a certain clarity and perspective in that inexperience. Young adult dystopian fiction provides the adolescent audience

with "the impression that they have the capacity to remake or revision society anew" while adults are too entrenched in ideology to be able to perceive the extent of its defects and amend it accordingly (Hintz 263).

Collective adherence to the rules implemented by the Committee is the only standard of morality in Lowry's dystopia. Without deliberate and insubordinate cultivation, the individual conscience does not exist apart from community directives. The law is the written manifestation of ideology; the meticulous rules literalize and make a caricature of convention in our contemporary society. The rules go as far as making bragging and rudeness criminal (27). Jonas, however, is shaken when he realizes that he is exempted from this rule, as well as the rule against lying, when he is assigned the privileged position of "Receiver of Memory" at the Ceremony (68). He also learns that other assignments are not only given permission to but required to lie. Moral practices such as apologies and their acceptance are prescript and expected immediately, and are thus ingenuine. The apology ritual is performed "automatically" and "indifferently" (89, 101). The translation of morality into institutional law makes it paradoxically amoral and political. In their compliance with the pedantic moral specificity of the community rules, the aspiration of ethics as a personal commitment to one's character is eclipsed.

The law mandates other actions that a healthy conscience would prompt, such as volunteerism. Jonas recounts a unique occasion when an "Eleven" who had not completed his required amount of volunteer hours was publicly abased. There was "a public announcement...and he would not...be given his Assignment...a disgrace that had clouded his entire future" (28). Disgrace, shame, and guilt are the oblique ways that the community's ideology is preserved. The reader witnesses the effect of these imposed sensations on Jonas. When the Chief Elder singles him out at the Ceremony, Jonas immediately asks himself, "*What [have I] done wrong?*" (58); he experiences "humiliation and terror" at the notion of his detachment from the rest of his group (59). Jonas has difficulty overcoming his "[fear] that he might disgrace himself" just as in the failure of the previous Twelve, Rosemary, who was selected to apprentice the current Receiver (80). Even in death, she is so reviled by the community that her name is "designated Not-to-Be-Spoken...the highest degree of disgrace" (67). However, the loss of honor in the community's terms because of disobedience is an achievement of independent agency. Lowry's narrative values this difficult nonconformity over public approval and certainly over popularity within an ideological collective; the narrative exhorts this perspective in the reader. Rosemary's name, while arbitrarily chosen for her by the Elders when she was taken from her Birthmother, becomes so rich in meaning that the community—which operates because of the lack of profound emotion—cannot contend with its associations.

Ideological Language

Lowry depicts the fixed meaning that the dystopian community's ideology assigns to language as a principal method that the existing power structure engages to control the residents. The random assigning of a name to an

infant that is beforehand referred to by the number indicating birth order is an analogy for the fixed and limited meanings that the Committee designates to language. It is also symbolic for the meaning that the collective dictates in an individual's identity, or, rather, lack thereof. Lowry shows ideology's authoritarian determination of language as having influence in the members of the community's self-definition: "Sometimes parents used [their child's original birth number] in irritation at a child's misbehavior, indicating that mischief made one unworthy of a name" (50). In *The Giver*, one's given name, which is in our culture valued as a surface designation of an individual's identity, is manipulated to promote ideology. The Giver emblematically challenges language's oppression by never divulging his given name and refusing to be acknowledged by the Committee's mandated identity. The narrative, in a pedagogical attitude, prompts the adolescent audience to examine normalized language for the instruments of oppression and invites them to challenge those norms. Jonas becomes a model for the reader as to what this dissent looks like.

Lowry makes the naming process representative of other language in Jonas's society that the hegemonic infrastructure exploits. Capitalized terms are often euphemisms that veil the controversial nature of the ideas they label. "Release" is used in place of "lethal injection" or even "exile"—which would still preserve the deception that the victims are merely departing the community—because the term connotes an aspect of mercy and benevolence on the part of the Committee. It reinforces the misperception that the Committee is entirely innocuous and magnanimous. Labeling those who are to be Released as "Inadequate" assigns the fault to the individual and not to the social system. The Elders also make the distinction between "Release" and "Loss," which qualifies the accidental death of a member of the community although in both situations an innocent life is ended and "they [haven't] done anything wrong" (44, 7). Even calling the community leadership a "Committee" encourages a more benign, less institutionalized conceptualization than "government," although in reality the community administration is virtually totalitarian. Defining sexuality as "Stirrings" implies that such natural developments are actually a trivial disturbance of harmony and nothing that merits close examination (54). Colloquially referring to individuals who are "uneducated or clumsy...[and] don't fit in" as "animals" exhibits how language dehumanizes the public and drafts it into prevailing ideology (54).

Lowry portrays Jonas acquiring autonomy as he gradually learns the realities behind the misleading terminology his community indulges. When the Giver imparts his memories to Jonas, he discovers the truth behind all of these terms. The effect of investigating the language normalized in the community is total disillusionment with everything he once knew about himself, his friends, and his whole society. Once the façade crumbles, he is overwrought at the automatic obedience and lack of moral conscience in the community. The author demonstrates to her audience that realizing difficult truths is necessary for "political and social awakening" (Hintz 255). The perverse social system has persisted for so long because the community determinedly avoids topics that are

"unsettling" or cause "discomfort" (20, 38). The narrator states early in the novel that in the community, it is "always better, less rude, to talk about things that [are] the same" (38). Jonas seeks to acquire an authentic language that subverts ideology. He obtains from the Giver's memories political consciousness and experiences to supply that subversive language with meaning. His political activism is a determination to create a world that is authentic and meaningful on his own terms. Jonas also seeks to expose in his community "the need for political action and the exercise of political will in a democratic society" (255). Jonas overcomes his despair that "he could change nothing" and takes radical action to induce the latent political consciousness in his peers. At this point, Jonas embodies the model that Lowry, as she is representative of adult culture in the contemporary US, envisions as most beneficial to our society's contingent future.

Agency and Nonconformity

Jonas's discovery of his agency is made heroic by the fact that his nonconformity continued despite being ostracized by his peers. The commitment to his newfound convictions is especially courageous because the community harshly stigmatizes those who step outside of ideology. The only alternative for people who feel as though they do not belong is to "apply for Elsewhere and be Released," which means death (48). Jonas expresses the fear that society planted in him of being separate from the group after he discovers the nature of his Assignment which disallows any socializing with his friends after training (69). Lowry continually uses the words "silence" and "awkward" to describe Jonas's interactions with both his friends and family after he begins to receive the memories that grant meaning to his existence (127, 134). The reader sympathizes with both Jonas's new worldview and with the feeling of being ostracized, and his resistance to pull of conformity in midst of his social isolation makes him even more heroic rather than an outcast in the reader's interpretation. Following one's individual sense of morality is portrayed as right and admirable instead of following ideology's conventions. Lowry is seeking to encourage this sort of steadfast heterodoxy in the youth culture in her narrative by allying Jonas and the reader. As Jonas realizes that the difficulty of nonconformity is worth an adherence to his moral and political conscience so does the reader accept this as mandatory to an authentic and politically responsible existence.

Young adult readers can easily identify with Jonas because Lowry creates him to be simultaneously an individual and an everyman. This empathy forms a bridge that enables the adolescent audience to relate to and identify with him, and thus accept the same revelations Jonas experiences about nonconformism, political duty, and the unethical ideology. The reader's relationship with Jonas allows her to project herself onto his role and receive the subtextual moral of Lowry's strategic narrative to apply it to her own practices. Because Jonas is more integrated in the community culture and unfamiliar at the start of the novel, the reader identifies and questions the protagonist's worldviews. However, the reader develops a connection to the character as the

story progresses and advocates for his freedom. Because Lowry makes Jonas so likeable and so available to identification, she can at once narratively impart Jonas with realization and encourage her audience to adopt the same attitudes. This is the primary method which Lowry invokes to facilitate a pedagogical interaction between the reader and the text.

The Giver's Role

While Lowry promotes subversive reaction to the adult culture of institutions and ideology, the role of the Giver as a catalyst to this reaction is a stipulation to adolescents' self-determination. The Giver is isolated as the only adult in the community who disagrees with the status quo. From Jonas's initiation into the role of the Receiver to the carrying out of their plan to unleash the memories upon the community, the Giver and the knowledge he imparts are the sources of Jonas's revelation. The Giver performs the role of mentor to both Jonas and the reader. He serves as Lowry's proxy—the voice of forgotten morality that calls for renewal of conscience. The Giver, who embodies the archetypal role of the “wise old man” (or “senex”) in a pedagogical relationship to the protagonist, can be interpreted as either merely a trigger for adolescent self-realization or an insidious limitation upon self-realization as manipulative as the community's ideology (Jung 37). If the former is assumed, then the Giver serves merely as an invitation for Jonas to look to the past as resources for his own self-determined critical approach to the present objectionable circumstances of society. If the latter is the assumed, then the entire moral of the narrative is suspect—Lowry is then directing the reader's trust to the traditions of the past and fostering distrust of any experimentation with the pseudo-communist aspects characteristic of Jonas's community. In pointing to the past as the desirable solution to the oppression of the present, Lowry thus invalidates the principles behind such pseudo-communist practices rather than only the mishapen manner in which those practices are applied.

The text's advocacy for the independent agency of adolescents is colored by the Giver's role—if it were not for his intervention, Jonas would have continued to abide by the standards of the community. This presents an apparent contradiction to the text's campaign to urge young adults to gain autonomous thinking. In the end, Jonas, because he is young and resilient where the Giver is old and “weakened,” is the one who has to shoulder the risk (Lowry 156). The Giver remains safely in the community where he will be looked to as an authority figure who can guide the masses toward understanding: “[the community] would not know what to do and would seek [the Giver's] advice. He would go to the Auditorium...he would stride to the stage and command their attention” (161). Jonas makes the greatest sacrifice by leaving the community, his friends, and everything he knows to risk his life in the wilderness while the Giver receives the glory as the savior of the shaken residents.

The Giver's influential role raises the question of the intention behind Lowry's promotion of adolescents protesting an unethical sociopolitical situation. However, the Giver tells Jonas, “having you here with me over the past year has made me realize that things must change” (154). Jonas represents

practical hope for a different future, so, in essence, he is the catalyst as much as the Giver for social change. While Jonas would likely not have experienced a revelation of political consciousness without the Giver, without Jonas, the Giver would never have considered a revolution as a realistic aspiration. Lowry promotes an adolescent agency informed by the past rather than only reacting to present circumstances. In young adults' striving for a better future, the text indicates that they must not only base their beliefs on the isolated present but must understand history in all its successes and failures. The text suggests that “we live in the past, and our only choice is between alternative pasts which might supply our mental furniture...If a society loses its history...that society [can] now have only a disembodied existence. It [will] have lost all those many things which made it itself” (Clark 13). History contains both the intentions and outcomes of the spectrum of liberating and oppressive sociopolitical principles; this knowledge explicates in sharp relief what is at stake and provides a greater authority of understanding from which to judge what is right and wrong in society. It also allows a more informed prediction of the trajectories resulting from certain decisions. In this model, youth are still the body with the power to act and transform an unethical society.

Conclusion

Through the development of a protagonist that the young adult audience can readily identify with, the text of *The Giver* and the adult subculture that Lowry's represents pedagogically imparts a model by which adolescents must critically approach the ideology promoted by authority figures; if that ideology is found to be faulty, adolescents must take a stand against it despite the likelihood that they will be misunderstood and thus alienated from that society. The text instructs that such alienation is noble and just, and that perseverance in this subversion—even if it is upheld alone—in and of itself is meaningful and can have a significant impact on society. The novel has an open ending, passing on a sense of duty in the reader to continue Jonas's legacy of political activism—for in real-world terms, Jonas can be reduced to a self-sacrificing, adolescent political activist. The narrative contests the fixed meanings that adults patronize and portrays them as largely incapable of doing anything but sustaining the established ideology. In this, Lowry counsels the young adult audience to be wary of the standards normalized by the institutionalized adult perspective and to resist depending on their judgment, which deteriorates rather than improves as they persist in an ideologically-driven society.

The Giver is the first popular novel that uses a dystopian story to didactically target the young adult audience and impart to them the subtextual message to rebel against the corrupt and oppressive aspects of contemporary society. This model has been recreated in many young adult dystopian works following the publication of Lowry's novel, such as *Feed* (2002), *The Uglies* (2005), and *The Hunger Games* (2008). The pedagogical interaction epitomized by *The Giver* has become standard to the genre. Lowry represents an adult perspective on how youth should counteract a culture that is regressing because of the self-protective ideology endorsed by institutions and their adult authority.

As a whole, the narrative empowers youth to seize their agency and seeks to free them to act in opposition to popular culture. The prerequisite to a moral and meaningful dissent, according to Lowry, is a consideration of the past. The young adult audience is acquainted with this model and persuaded to emulate it through the characters, plot, and dystopian narrative structure of *The Giver*.

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One Nation, Two Voices: Whitman, Dickinson and the Combined Call of American Poet and Prophet

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The poet has always occupied a very unique place in society. As an artistic observer, the poet's primary job is to provide an alternative perspective of his or her world. To be truly successful, however, the poet must also articulate this new perspective using language and form that makes it accessible and relevant to both present and future generations. These aspects of the poet's role are addressed by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essays "Nature" and "The Poet." In these works, Emerson discusses his belief that all generations have a particular perspective and expression of the world and are therefore in need of their own distinctive voice; that voice, he claims, is the voice of the poet.

The poetic voice Emerson describes in these works is often connected to American Romantic poet Walt Whitman, whose poetry possesses the qualities and addresses the topics Emerson outlines in his essays. It is interesting to note, however, that Emerson's work has not as frequently been applied to Whitman's contemporary Emily Dickinson whose poems, even though published after her death and therefore much later than Whitman's, also display a similar combination of social critique and spiritual vigor. Despite their apparent differences in poetic form, it is clear through the revolutionary nature of their styles and the thematic overlaps that occur across their work that both Dickinson and Whitman satisfy Emerson's definition of the successful poet.

Emerson's call for and description of the poetic voice, however, have even stronger implications for these poets when examined with a larger scholastic lens. Claims within "Nature" and "The Poet" strike strong similarities with the work of theologian Walter Brueggemann, whose focus lies primarily in the prophetic tradition. Specifically in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, Brueggemann provides a definition of prophetic voice that closely mirrors Emerson's claims about the poet. Based on these connections that exist between Emerson and Brueggemann, therefore, I believe both Whitman and Dickinson can be read as prophets. Their poetic voices carry tones of strong social critique as well as a vision of newness, all of which are expressed in the characteristic vivid poetry of prophetic ministry.

I. A Unified Call: Emerson's Poet and Brueggemann's Prophet

The similarities between Emerson and Brueggemann begin with their definitions of *call*. Both scholars see the call for the poet and prophet as based in an overarching social need, a need that can only be satisfied by the

distinctive voice they describe. In "Nature," Emerson issues his first call for the poet to his 19th century peers:

[w]hy should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?... There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship. (903)

Emerson's call draws upon many aspects of human experience -- art, scholarship, history, faith, geography, politics -- to illustrate how widespread the scope of the poet truly is. Based on this call, the poet is not limited by established stratifications of social order. In fact, later in his essay Emerson states that such social ordering results in the corruption of human beings and of language, obscuring the community's vision of and access to truth. Through his or her words, then, the poet must "pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things; so that picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it, is a man in alliance with truth and God" ("Nature" 913).

Furthermore, Emerson states that the poet, while presenting a countercultural message, cannot have a singular, self-contained identity. In other words, to be truly effective the poet cannot be entirely other from his or her community. Emerson describes the poet as representative; he or she "stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth but of the commonwealth" ("The Poet" 985). This particular aspect of Emerson's call requires that the poet is one who can balance a multitude of human experiences "without impediment, who sees and handles that which others dream of, traverses the whole scale of experience, and is representative of man, in virtue of being the largest to receive and to impart" ("The Poet" 985-986).

Similar to Emerson, Brueggemann's call for the prophetic voice originates from his observation that society has strayed from a path of truth and pure experience and must be put back on track. He states that the dominant consciousness "has been claimed by false fields of perception and idolatrous systems of language and rhetoric" (*The Prophetic Imagination* 1). These "idolatrous systems" Brueggemann refers to are the same as Emerson's "rotten diction"; they are the oppressive ideologies and constructs that emerge from the dominant consciousness. In order to overcome and dismantle these constructs, Brueggemann explains that the prophet must be a child of tradition, one who has taken it seriously in the shaping of his or her own field of perception and system of language, who is so at home in that memory that the points of contact and incongruity...in culture can be discerned and articulated with proper urgency. (*The Prophetic Imagination* 2)

This tradition to which Brueggemann refers is based in the Biblical Exodus narrative that affirms God as an advocate for social liberation. Just as

Emerson requires the poet to encompass the entirety of human understanding despite cultural expectations, so Brueggemann sees the prophet as one who can look through social institutions and identify the free nature of God as opposed to "the static God of order" (*The Prophetic Imagination* 8).

While the idea of recognizing and proclaiming the true nature of God may seem more abstract than Emerson's focus on generational distinctions, Brueggemann is very specific about how the prophet achieves this feat. He describes the duty of the prophet as two-fold; he or she must "criticize in dismantling the dominant consciousness" and "energize persons and communities by [the] promise of another time and situation toward which the community...may move" (*The Prophetic Imagination* 3). These tasks require the prophet to be simultaneously conscious of the current situation and of an arriving future not yet realized. Brueggemann's emphasis on social criticism and communal energizing, therefore, again reflects Emerson's description of the poet as one who is fully involved with but not a simple product of his or her community. For both Emerson and Brueggemann, the voice they call for has the ability to observe, explain and dismantle dysfunctional social structures to expose a greater truth.

It is important to note here that within their particular calls Emerson and Brueggemann point to different sources of this truth that the prophet must reintroduce to society; Emerson identifies Nature as the primary inspiration of the poetic voice, and Brueggemann names the Exodus narrative and Mosaic tradition as the prophetic foundations. For Emerson, ultimate success for the poet is spreading the enlightenment achieved through communion with Nature while the goal of Brueggemann's prophet is the "formation of a new social community to match the vision of God's freedom" (*The Prophetic Imagination* 7). Even though these perspectives seem to lead in separate directions, Emerson and Brueggemann are in fact referring to the same concept. Both Emerson and Brueggemann are calling for a voice that breaks through the dominant consciousness and exposes some type of existence free from societal constraints. The final and perhaps most important shared feature of these calls, therefore, is the requirement of prophets to use their understanding of truth to give their community awareness of and access to the freedom society has obstructed for so long.

II. Artful Observers: Social Criticism in Whitman and Dickinson

The search for truth and the recognition that existing social systems are not conducive to experiencing this truth are substantial themes within Whitman and Dickinson's poetry. Both poets criticize aspects of 19th century American culture that result in the oppression of certain people based on gender, socio-economic status and religious belief to make it "clear that things are not as they should be, not as they were promised, and not as they must be and will be" (*The Prophetic Imagination* 12). Through these powerful, countercultural lines, Whitman and Dickinson effectively meet Emerson and Brueggemann's requirement that the prophetic voice "turns the

world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession” (“The Poet” 991).

Much of Whitman’s poetry is dedicated to breaking down the barriers of various social constructs. As a poet who identified himself as a representation of the average American, Whitman focused a great deal on the constitutional rhetoric of freedom, liberty and equality. This emphasis is seen quite clearly in parts 21 and 24 of “Song of Myself”. In these sections, Whitman presents strong challenges to the established social structures of sexism, classism and religion which he saw as obstructing the creation of an unified community. In Part 21, Whitman states, “I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,/ And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man” (lines 425-426). These lines clearly reject the dominant patriarchal ideology of Whitman’s time. By relating himself to a woman and claiming that women are equal to men, Whitman is posing a direct challenge to traditional sexist thought in his society. A similar critique appears in Part 24: “Whoever degrades another degrades me,/ And whatever is done or said returns at last to me” (lines 503-504). Here, Whitman extends his empathy to any and all members of society. In both of these excerpts, Whitman expresses the interconnectedness of human experience. Instead of adhering to the strict gender binary and class system of his time, Whitman claims that all people, regardless of social status, are on an equal plain.

Whitman also criticizes problematic ideologies of dominant organized religion within the poem. In particular he voices objections to the practice of dualism, the belief that body and soul are in strict separation; the body is viewed as sinful and unclean and the soul is considered sacred and transcendent. He claims in Part 21:

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
The first, I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue. (lines 422-424)

Here Whitman asserts that body and soul are equal, unified and can be represented by one poetic voice. He strengthens this point by juxtaposing heaven and hell and proclaiming his ability to represent both of these seemingly oppositional concepts. Additionally, the idea of increasing the pleasure of heaven and translating the pains of hell questions the entire binary system the church has established between body and soul, sin and salvation. Whitman’s criticism of dualism is also developed in Part 24 where he states:

I believe in the flesh and the appetites,
Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle.
Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch’d from,
The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,

This head more than churches, bibles and all the creeds.
(lines 522-526)

In these lines, he asserts again the sacredness of the human body as higher than objects and rituals of organized religion. Further, Whitman’s use of Christian terms such as churches, bibles and creeds makes his critique of dualism even more specific; it is clear that he is talking about the dominant Christian church in America and not other minority religions present in society.

These critiques of organized religion are echoed in Dickinson’s “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church”. In the first two lines of this poem, “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church -/ I keep it, staying at Home -”, Dickinson also challenges the traditional notion that sacred space is restricted to the church grounds. Unlike Whitman, however, Dickinson does not elevate the human body as a means of worship. Instead she offers the familiar and comfortable spaces of one’s home as an alternative to formal, restrictive church quarters. Dickinson’s final stanza highlights the dangers of worshipping in such a place. She writes:

God preaches, a noted Clergyman -
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last -
I’m going, all along. (lines 9-12)

These lines claim that if people limit their worship to the strict boundaries of church space and structured services they will overlook, or even entirely miss, experiences of grace during their life. By specifically stating that God’s sermon is “never long”, Dickinson is drawing a contrast between experiences of God’s true, free ministry and that of the ordered church. For Dickinson, heaven is revealed “all along” her lifetime and not just during her time within the church walls.

III. The Image of Change: The Poets’ Prophetic Energizing

The next job of the prophet is to use his or her social criticisms to inspire and energize the community towards social change. This energizing is crucial because the dominant culture the prophet critiques “is a wearied culture, nearly unable to be seriously energized to new promises from God,” or new revelations of truth (*The Prophetic Imagination* 4). In order to energize a community, the poet and prophet must have a “better perception...[that] sees the flowing or metamorphosis; perceives that thought is multiform; that within every creature is a force impelling it to ascend into a higher form” (“The Poet” 991). The goal of energizing, therefore, is to express this perspective in such a way as to motivate present and future generations toward the newness and higher form they wish to attain.

In his poems “I Sing the Body Electric” and “Song of the Open Road,” Whitman uses the physical sensations of touch and open nature as energizing themes. Even within the titles of the poems, the significance of these two experiences is made quite clear. Whitman begins “I Sing the Body

Electric" by expressing the ability of physical touch to empower individuals and build community. He writes, "The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,/ They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,/ And discurrup them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul" (lines 2-4). In these lines Whitman claims that a shared embrace can not only foster community through physical connection but also can serve as a catalyst for better communication, moral improvement and spiritual renewal. Also, the description of this community as a group of armies implies a shared objective and strategy. Based on the surrounding lines, this goal seems to be the unification and shared experience of the community that is achieved through physical closeness.

Whitman's assertion that the body can serve as an energizing force also connects with his criticisms of dualism. Later in the poem he observes, "There is something in staying close to men and women and looking on them, and in the contact and odor of them, that pleases the soul well" (line 50). By directly linking physical experiences to spiritual ones, Whitman is again breaking down the Church's separation of body and soul and furthering his efforts to energize his readers towards positive change. This body-soul connection continues in his poem "Song of the Open Road". While describing a journey through the wilderness, Whitman pauses to reflect: "The efflux of the soul is happiness, here is happiness,/ I think it pervades the open air, waiting at all times,/ Now it flows unto us, we are rightly charged" (lines 105-107). In these lines, the physical sensations of nature invigorate the body and the soul to a pure experience of happiness.

This happiness Whitman describes, however, is not a solitary emotion. In the final stanza of the poem, Whitman explicitly calls for the reader to join him in this community bound by shared experience:

Camerado, I give you my hand!
I give you my love more precious than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live? (lines 220-224)

Whitman's approach to energizing, although based in physical sensation, is truly geared toward community building. He asks not just to be touched, but offers himself up to the reader in return; Whitman dedicates himself to the task to inspiring others to experience touch and nature to their fullest extents.

While Whitman's energizing comes primarily from close camaraderie and physical proximity, Dickinson relies on more intangible experiences to motivate society towards alternative consciousness. In her poem "This World is not conclusion" Dickinson describes the tension between science and faith in such a way as to inspire her readers to transcend binary thinking. She writes:

This World is not conclusion -
A Species stands beyond -

Invisible, as Music -
But positive, as Sound -/
It beckons, and it baffles. (lines 2-5)

The opening lines of this poem makes some significant claims. First, Dickinson declaratively states that the world we know is not ultimately reality. This claim, even though at first unsettling, is effective at energizing because it opens up infinite other realities to experience, explore and understand. Dickinson continues this inspiration by referencing a "Species...beyond." Her description of this species as both invisible and positive connotes a majestic and mysterious quality, again energizing the reader or audience with the idea of possibility and newness. Finally, the species Dickinson describes actually calls to the readers itself, leading them forward into an unrealized, ever-arriving future.

Later in the poem, Dickinson further intrigues the reader towards an engaged spirituality by describing faith as a clumsy yet resilient character; "Faith slips - and laughs, and rallies -" (line 13). This personification of the social construct she has previously criticized allows Dickinson to continue to point out the flaws of organized religion without discrediting the merits of faith itself. In other words, she is able to give her readers hope for a new kind of faith that can interact with science and other influences without the threat of negation or failure. Her readers, then, are energized to seek alternative, innovative approaches to thought and belief.

IV. Creating Alternative Consciousness: Whitman, Dickinson and Paradox

Although not explicitly stated, the ability to identify and express paradox is also inherent in Emerson and Brueggemann's calls. Both scholars list different extremes of human experience and expect the voice they call for to freely navigate among these polarities. Further, the prophet must not only articulate these paradoxical experiences but also understand how to live within them; he or she has to know how these extremes and the gray area between them exist in harmony. For example, the poet and prophet, while possessing great knowledge and understanding, always "knows well that it is not his; that it is as strange and beautiful to him as to you" ("The Poet" 998). In other words, he or she can have both the knowledge of paradox and the awareness that such knowledge is a gift and not a possession. Through such processes, the poet and prophet creates what Brueggemann refers to as alternative consciousness.

Both Whitman and Dickinson demonstrate the skills of expressing and existing in paradox within their poems. Throughout much of his work Whitman utilizes his characteristic catalogue to describe the infinite variations held within our world. In "Song of Myself", he juxtaposes prostitutes and Presidents, sin and salvation, birth and death, and many other seemingly oppositional pairings to illustrate the interconnectedness between all aspects of society and human experience. Whitman also addresses philosophical and religious uses of paradox in "Song of the Open Road".

Line 174 of the poem reads, "To see no possession but you may possess it, enjoying all without labor or purchase, abstracting the feast yet not abstracting one particle of it" (line 174). Instead of focusing on the physical aspects of human experience as her often does, Whitman here draws from more abstract sources such as Christian and Taoist philosophy to evoke the spiritual gains of accepting and understanding paradox. Finally, Whitman's understanding and even admiration of paradox is perhaps most explicitly stated in Part 51 of "Song of Myself". Here, he uses his own voice as the embodiment of paradoxical experience. He proclaims: "Do I contradict myself?/ Very well, I contradict myself,/ (I am large, I contain multitudes)" (lines 1324-1326). In these lines Whitman makes it clear that not only does he understand the presence and importance of paradox in society but also that he accepts paradox as a fundamental part of himself.

Dickinson also demonstrates a deep understanding of paradox throughout her poetry. For example, her piece "Much Madness is divinest Sense" is entirely devoted to the exploration and explanation of paradox, and despite its short length, the poem provides a profound message about the paradoxical nature of society and human experience within it. Her opening lines describe this paradox with sharp brevity: "Much Madness is divinest Sense -/ To a discerning Eye -/ Much Sense - the Starkest Madness -" (lines 1-3). These few lines voice a strong aversion to dominant society's definition of sanity. She identifies what the majority considers sensible behavior as "Starkest Madness" while affirming the alternative perspectives as "divinest Sense."

A shift occurs in the last lines, however, from a discussion of ideologies to commentary on how these ideologies are applied to the social treatment of individuals. Dickinson observes, "Assent - and you are sane -/ Demur - you're straightway dangerous -/ And handled with a Chain -" (lines 5-7). These lines clearly show Dickinson's critique of dominant society's persecution of those who are other and stand outside the majority's rule. The detail of the chain in the last line in particular implies a great deal of force that must be resisted in order for an individual of alternative mind to maintain his or her agency. There is, then, a more painful, personal sense of struggle here than in the earlier lines of the poem. It is important to notice, though, that even here Dickinson does not critique the paradox itself. Rather, she seems content with these opposites and remains confident that an alternative consciousness is the clearer path to truth.

V. Visions of Hope, Paths to Liberation

The ultimate goal of the poet and prophet through the practices of social criticism, communal energizing and alternative consciousness building is to instill hope. All of these actions work towards redirecting society on a path towards some ultimate truth, whether that take the form of communion with nature or a connection with the free God. Once such communion or connection is made, then liberation from the dominant culture is possible. By

observing and articulating oppressive social structures, energizing their readers to explore new thoughts and experiences, and constantly constructing and presenting alternative perspectives of our world, Whitman and Dickinson serve as two examples of the compelling prophetic voice that can lead communities to this type of liberation. As Emerson states, "poets are thus liberating Gods... They are free and they make free" ("The Poet" 995).

Whitman and Dickinson's role as prophets, therefore, is not limited to the time in which they lived. The prophetic voice is concerned with "addressing, in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated" (*The Prophetic Imagination* 3). In other words, no matter the specific age in which they are speaking or the particular cultural issues they address, the work of poets such as Whitman and Dickinson remains relevant in any time of social struggle.

In the closing paragraphs of "The Poet", Emerson describes the cultural climate in which Whitman and Dickinson lived, wrote and prophesied:

On the brink of the waters of life and truth, we are miserably dying. The inaccessibleness of every thought but that we are in, is wonderful.... Therefore we love the poet, the inventor, who in any form, whether in an ode, or in an action, or in looks and behavior, has yielded us a new thought. He unlocks our chains, and admits us to a new scene. (995)

Emerson's diagnosis of American society in the late 1800s remains eerily applicable to our 21st century experiences. We are in an age of failing economic systems, illogical wars, legally sanctioned prejudice and unjust cultural domination, an age longing for alternative consciousness and hope for change. These social similarities make it possible for the works of Whitman and Dickinson to continue to help us see our own faults, empower our emerging strengths and lead us in making new, hopeful perspectives for a future that, without the prophet's voice, could not be expressed.

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What's Wrong with Jeanie Bueller: Reexamining Ferris Bueller's Day Off through Feminist Criticism

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"Life moves pretty fast," says Ferris Bueller in director John Hughes's hit 1986 film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. "If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." This line captures the mantra of Ferris Bueller, the film's charming teenage protagonist, who skips his high school classes to enjoy a beautiful day in Chicago with his friends. The focus of this film is not, as one might expect, the tension of Ferris avoiding getting caught. As cultural anthropologist Michael Moffatt points out in his analysis of the film, it is "clear from the beginning that Ferris will probably get away with everything" (369). The film is instead focused on the character of Ferris, who not only lives out the teenage fantasy of skipping school without punishment but also possesses a dynamic persona that allows him to rise above the social norms and expectations of his environment. In other words, Ferris is someone who overcomes the obstacles of "social circumstance" and is "able to achieve complete self-definition" (Baym 595). By serving as the model for self-definition, Ferris enables his friend Cameron to liberate himself from his father's control. The film's portrayal of self-definition as both possible and attainable for anyone is misleading because it implies that "individuals come before society" and that those individuals are able to determine their own destinies "unhindered" by the constraints of society (Baym 595).

In this essay, I will reexamine *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* using feminist criticism. In order to reexamine this film, I will begin by identifying what its primary themes are. By analyzing the film itself, how it was intended by John Hughes and how it has been interpreted by viewers, I will show that its primary themes are self-definition and self-liberation. I will then apply feminist critical theory to the film to illustrate how its themes support the dominant discourse and patriarchy of American society (Bressler 168). I will show how *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* is, at its core, a "melodrama of beset manhood" as described by Nina Baym (594). I will demonstrate how the character of Ferris Bueller is an example of the male-oriented American myth of a person who is "divorced from specific social circumstances" and who is able to "achieve complete self-definition" (Baym 595). Lastly, I will focus on the character of Jeanie Bueller, Ferris's sister, and examine how instead of being afforded the same potential for self-definition as Ferris and Cameron, she is cast "in the melodramatic role of temptress, antagonist, [and] obstacle" to Ferris's mission of liberation (Baym 596). By examining all of these aspects the film through feminist criticism, I contend that the themes of self-definition and self-liberation in *Ferris*

Bueller's Day Off privilege males over females and thereby limit their applicability to women or, for that matter, any disadvantaged group of people in society.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off is a quintessential "feel good" movie. There is nothing particularly impressive about it in terms of production quality, acting or originality, and yet, there is something about the film that has endeared itself to millions of Americans for the past twenty-four years since its release, including some of the toughest film reviewers and critics in journalism. Chicago Sun-Times columnist Richard Roeper calls it "something of a suicide prevention film," adding, "[*Ferris Bueller's Day Off*] is one of my favorite movies of all time... I can watch it again and again" (1). When the film first released in 1986, prominent critic Roger Ebert wrote, "Here is one of the most innocent movies in a long time," calling it a "sweet, warm hearted comedy" (1-2). Ben Stein, who makes a cameo in the film as a monotonous economics teacher, sums up the appeal of the film: "I don't know if there's ever been a happier movie. It's a movie that you cannot watch without feeling really, really great" ("The World According to Ben Stein"). What is it that makes *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* so uplifting for viewers? The answer lies primarily in the film's themes of self-definition and self-liberation.

The themes of the film are embodied in its main character, Ferris Bueller, and the attitude with which he perceives the world. In an interview conducted after the film's release, writer and director John Hughes explains what his intentions were when he created the character of Ferris. "With Ferris Bueller," Hughes says, "I wanted to do a film that showed someone for whom life was easy. They weren't beset with problems. They weren't labored with all of the difficulties that everyone else is" ("Who is Ferris Bueller?"). The reason Ferris is free from problems is primarily due to his philosophy on life. Ferris is someone who wants to maximize his life, to seize upon opportunities and make the most of them. He knows "life moves fast," so he wants to use that time productively. Mathew Broderick, who played Ferris in the film, says, "He's more than a person. He's an attitude, a way of life and sort of a leader of men" ("Who is Ferris Bueller?"). Ferris is able to act upon his desires no matter what the circumstance might dictate. Whether its faking sickness to skip school, talking his way into an exclusive restaurant, or performing in a parade, Ferris is always able to do what he wants when he wants. Cameron is mystified as to how Ferris is able to do this. He says, "You know, as long as I've known him everything works for him. There's nothing he can't handle. I can't handle anything. School, parents, the future... Ferris can do anything." Ferris's life is "the encapsulation of every person's dream" because he is not constrained by the responsibilities, risks and rules of his environment; he defines what he wants and then does it ("The Word According to Ben Stein"). Because of this, he is the ultimate example of self-definition.

Ferris is able to achieve total self-definition and pursue what makes him happy because he is able to liberate himself from the constraints of society. Herein lies the second major theme of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*: self-liberation. The film assumes that the greatest obstacle to a person achieving self-definition is the inertia and inaction of the individual. Ferris's liberation of himself from his obligation to go to school is a microcosm of his ability to free himself. "A lot of people don't really do whatever they want. A lot of people are so restricted by themselves and by everything around them. I think that the wonderfully attractive thing about Ferris is that he has no restrictions. He sets no restrictions on himself. He will do anything" (Mia Sara - "Who is Ferris Bueller?"). In other words, the restrictions placed on Ferris by his environment are irrelevant; what matters are the restrictions he might put upon himself, like fear, doubt or a lack of self-confidence. "Ferris Bueller tells us we can all have a day [off]" like his, says Ben Stein. "The secret is your own inner mobility and your own inner love of freedom" ("The World According to Ben Stein"). Furthermore, there is an implication that if one is able to liberate oneself, things will work out. The logic of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* is that if someone is able to obtain self-definition, self-liberation will follow, regardless of the situation, because a self-defined person is able to determine his or her own destiny.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off's themes of self-definition and self-liberation are inspiring to viewers, but it is clear there is something misleading about those themes when they are seen through the lens of feminist criticism. One of the main goals of feminist criticism, according to Charles Bressler's *Literary Criticism*, is to change "the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read" (168). Reexamining *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* through feminist criticism reveals that the themes of self-definition and self-liberation maintain patriarchy, which is defined by Bressler as "the rule of society and culture by men" (167). The notion that the individual always has the potential to liberate himself is a decidedly male-oriented perspective of society. For women, and for anyone who is not in power, the individual does *not* come before society. Society plays a very real role in affecting the actions and happiness of people. A woman's "inner love of freedom" is not enough to change the impact that society plays in her life ("The World According to Ben Stein"). By looking at *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* through feminist criticism, we can see that the film promotes the dominant discourse of society, especially the American myth of self-definition.

Nina Baym, in "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," describes the American myth of self-definition as "the pure American self divorced from specific social circumstances" (595). Ferris Bueller is the embodiment of this ideal, of someone who is "able to achieve complete self-definition" (Baym 595). Ferris does what he wants and is not confined by social structures. He is able to do this by asserting his own freedom with which he can "inscribe, unhindered, his own destiny and his own nature" on the world around him

(Baym 595). His "day off" is a day that is largely within his control. He determines what happens and does not waiver when faced with obstacles to his mission. When Ferris is snubbed at the exclusive restaurant, he insists on trying to get a table when his friends tell him he should back down. Ultimately his persistence pays off and they are able to enjoy a fancy meal in luxurious comfort. No matter what comes his way, Ferris is not fazed and remains steadfast in pursuing his goals for the day. In this way, the film promises that if an individual is able shed his or her self-created limitations, no external obstacle can keep him or her from achieving self-liberation.

This promise assumes that "individuals come before society," and that individuals "exist in some meaningful sense prior to, and apart from, societies in which they happen to find themselves" (Baym 595). This assumption, of course, is a misleading one because "nowhere on earth do individuals live apart from social groups" (Baym 595). The American myth ignores the role that society plays in shaping the individual and instead relies on the notion that society is a force that limits the individual. Thus, the core model of American literature can be described as "a melodrama of beset manhood" (Baym 594). These stories revolve around a protagonist's struggle to achieve self-definition in the face of obstacles. If the protagonist is unable to overcome those challenges, it is not the fault of external forces but of the protagonist's inability to rise above those forces. If the protagonist succeeds in overcoming those forces, it is not because of circumstance or luck but because of the protagonist's inner mobility and fortitude. As I have already shown, through examples of his ability to achieve self-definition, Ferris Bueller possesses that "certain believable mobility" that allows him to free himself from the constraints placed on him by his environment (Baym 596).

Ferris Bueller's Day Off promises that the mobility that Ferris possesses can be attained by anyone, even by someone who appears hopelessly defeated by life's circumstances like Ferris's friend Cameron. Cameron is, in many ways, the opposite of Ferris. He is indecisive, self-limited, and woefully depressed. The first time the audience sees Cameron is when Ferris calls Cameron to get him to come over. Cameron, who is lying in bed surrounded by tissues and bottles of medicine, tells him, "I can't, stupid. I'm sick." For Ferris, the phrase "I can't" indicates self-limitation. Ferris's worldview is all about possibility. Cameron's, conversely, is about impossibility. "That's all in your head," he tells Cameron. Ferris turns to the camera and explains, "If anybody needs a day off, it's Cameron. He's got a lot of things to sort out before he graduates." Ferris establishes that the root of Cameron's problems lies with Cameron's inaction and self-limitations. Cameron's character is not only meant to contrast with Ferris's but also is used as a demonstration of how self-definition is the key to overcoming one's problems.

Ferris admits that Cameron is in a more difficult situation because of family issues, but still maintains that the primary issue lies with Cameron. "His home life is really twisted," Ferris explains to camera. "That's why he's

sick all the time. It really bothers him." Ferris acknowledges that Cameron's "twisted" family has a significant impact on Cameron. Cameron's mother is never around, his parents hate each other and his father loves his Ferrari more than Cameron. "If I had to live in that house," Ferris says. "I'd probably pray for disease, too." However, Ferris believes that the *real* problem is that it "bothers" Cameron so much that he becomes paralyzed by fear and self-doubt. Once again, we see the American myth of "beset manhood" with Cameron's inability to "achieve complete self-definition" as an individual (Baym 594-595). Cameron's only hope for change is to follow the example that Ferris sets and liberate himself from his problems.

The climax of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* is Cameron's self-liberation. Cameron's transformation begins with the discovery that the miles added to the odometer on his father's Ferrari cannot be removed as Ferris had originally thought when they borrowed the car. Faced with the reality that his father will inevitably catch and punish him for using the Ferrari, Cameron makes a defining choice to stand up for himself. "I gotta take a stand," Cameron says to Ferris and Sloane. "I'm bullshit. I put up with everything. My old man pushes me around and I never say anything." Cameron's change in attitude marks a shift in his worldview. "He's not the problem," Cameron says of his father. "I'm the problem." Cameron no longer sees himself as a victim of circumstance but rather as a self-defined individual who has the ability to rise above his circumstances and free himself. "I am not going to sit on my ass as the events that affect me unfold to determine the course of my life," he exclaims. Cameron wants to determine his own destiny free from limitations.

It is important to note that Cameron's main limitation is not his father but his fear of his father. After he kicks and dents the car, he says, "I don't care, I really don't. I'm just tired of being afraid. Hell with him. I can't wait to see the look on the bastard's face." Cameron genuinely believes that if he is free of that fear, he will be able to overcome his father's control. No event can keep him from defining what he wants out of life. Of course, upon asserting this, Cameron accidentally sends the car hurtling out of the back of the garage and completely destroys it. This moment is the greatest test of Cameron's abilities. Instead of giving up and letting Ferris take the blame, Cameron says, "No, I'll take it." Within a short span of time, Cameron has gone from trying to drown himself when the car's odometer has been changed to confidently taking responsibility when the car is wrecked. Cameron gains the inner mobility that Ferris has and therefore is no longer afraid of confronting his father. Now that Cameron's attitude has changed, there is an underlying assumption that things will work out for him despite the severity of the situation. "It's going to be good," he tells Ferris. Cameron has become "divorced from [the constraints of] specific social circumstances" (Baym 595). Like Ferris, he has achieved the American myth of self-definition.

One must be careful not to look at Cameron's transformation purely at face value. By examining Cameron's change through feminist criticism, one can see that it is another example of the male-oriented idea of self-liberation. The mobility that Cameron gains "has until recently been a male prerogative" in American society (Baym 596). While it may appear in the film as though this mobility is available to everyone, this idea is clearly not the case for Jeanie Bueller, Ferris's sister. Jeanie is not able to achieve the same kind of self-definition that Ferris has or that Cameron later gains. Instead, Jeanie is cast "in the melodramatic role of temptress, antagonist, obstacle" to Ferris and whose "mission in life seems to be to ensnare him and deflect him from life's important purposes of self-discovery and self-assertion" (Baym 596). In other words, Jeanie is a classic example of a "stereotypical, male-created" female character, as Charles Bressler puts it in *Literary Criticism* (178). Jeanie is not only the opponent of Ferris but also an example of how the film's notions of self-definition and self-liberation are only applicable for privileged males.

"Wait, you're letting him stay home? I can't believe this." Jeanie says to her parents at the start of the film. "If I was bleeding out my eyes you guys would make me go to school. This is so unfair." Jeanie seems jealous of Ferris because he is able to get away with things that she is not able to get away with. While Ferris is out enjoying his day off, Jeanie is stuck in the confines of the school, brooding about Ferris. "Why should he get to do whatever he wants, whenever he wants?" she asks herself. "Why should everything work out for him? What makes him so goddamn special?" At this point, Jeanie snaps and says, "Screw him." Motivated by her jealousy, Jeanie decides to try to catch him in the act of skipping school.

When Jeanie tries to stop Ferris, things don't work out very well for her. She becomes vilified at school for her apparent indifference to Ferris's sickness. Students start a "Save Ferris" campaign and she is asked by one of them to donate to the cause to buy Ferris a new kidney. She tells the male student to "go piss up a flagpole" and then hits his can of coins out of his hands. As she storms off, he yells, "Hey! What if you need a favor someday from Ferris Bueller? Then where will you be, huh? You heartless wench!" When she returns home to prove that Ferris is out of the house, she runs into Ed Rooney, the principal, who is also there on the same mission. In a confused confrontation between the two, Jeanie does not recognize him and instead knocks him out with a kick to the face. She runs to her room and calls the police, but the police don't believe her when she tells them there is an intruder in her house. Instead, they accuse her of making a phony phone call and she is taken to the police station.

Jeanie's turning point comes at the police station where she gets "some quick therapy" from a "sexy" druggie played by actor Charlie Sheen and, as a result, becomes "reconciled to Ferris" (Moffatt 369). Sheen's character asks Jeanie why she is at the station and she explains how she got in trouble while trying to catch Ferris. He asks her, "So you're pissed off

because he ditches and doesn't get caught? Is that it?" She says yes and he tells her, "Then your problem is you." Jeanie is caught off guard by this accusation. He says, "You ought to spend a little more time dealing with yourself and a little less time worry about what your brother does." The druggie argues that Jeanie's *real* problem is her jealousy. If she were free of that jealousy she could focus on "dealing with herself" and thereby achieve self-liberation. This diagnosis seems to have a profound effect on Jeanie, who ends up making out with the druggie. Jeanie's change comes at the "nick of time" because her change of heart enables Ferris to get off the hook when Ed Rooney catches him behind Ferris's house (Moffatt 369). It appears as though Rooney has Ferris trapped. "I got you, Ferris," he says. "How would you feel about another year of high school, under my close, personal supervision?" Jeanie, at the last moment, saves the day by opening the back door and saying, "Thank God you're alright. You know, we've been worried sick about you." She winks to Ferris and then turns to Rooney. "Thank you Mr. Rooney for driving him home.... Can you imagine someone as sick as Ferris trying to walk home from the hospital? Oh, kids." Thanks to Jeanie's transformation, Rooney is foiled and Ferris succeeds in avoiding punishment. Like Cameron, it appears that Jeanie has learned a valuable lesson about self-liberation.

Has Jeanie really undergone the same transformation as Cameron? Although it appears that she has, the reality is that she has undergone a very different transformation, one from an aggressive, jealous troublemaker to a "passive, meek, and humble" girl (Bressler 173). She is not given the same opportunity to define herself as Cameron does. Imagine if Jeanie was the one who gave Cameron's speech: "*I gotta take a stand...*" "If I was bleeding out my eyes you guys would make me go to school..." "*I put up with everything...*" "Why should he get to do whatever he wants, whenever he wants?" "...*but I never say anything.*" "Why should he get to ditch when everybody else has to go?" "*Hell with him...*" "Screw him..." "This is so unfair..." "*I gotta take a stand.*" The reality is that Jeanie has a monologue that is very similar to Cameron's, but her character is portrayed very differently from his. What makes Jeanie different from Cameron? Why is she not entitled to "take a stand" against the injustice she is experiencing?

From a feminist perspective, we can see that Jeanie's motivation for trying to catch Ferris is not jealousy but a desire to right what is "unfair." She does not have the same ability to achieve self-definition as Ferris does because the American myth's promise that "individuals come before society" does not apply to her (Baym 595). She is the only one who is really able to see the injustice of the situation but she is the one who is punished. The students at her high school believe she is a "heartless wench." The school's receptionist sees that Jeanie is skipping class to catch Ferris and calls her a "little asshole." The police take her to the station instead of helping her when Rooney breaks into her house. While Ferris is out getting away with skipping school, her parents conclude that she's the problem child

of the family. "I just picked up Jeanie at the police station," says her mother when they return home. "She got a speeding ticket, another speeding ticket and I lost the Vermont deal because of her." "I think we should shoot her," says her father. And yet, despite all of these societal forces pushing her around, the druggie at the police station tells Jeanie, "Your problem is you."

If there is any "problem" with Jeanie Bueller, it is that she ultimately gives in to the patriarchy of society by allowing Ferris to get away with skipping school at the end of the film. Why does she let Ferris get away with it? Maybe she honestly believes what the druggie tells her, that she is the problem and that she should not worry about what her brother is doing. Perhaps she is tired of being viewed as an "entraper and impediment" to the self-liberation of men (Baym 598). After all, her pursuit of Ferris has only caused more problems for her. Whatever the reason, it is clear that by saving Ferris, Jeanie is supporting patriarchy, which is indicative of how women in often maintain the very social structures that oppress them.

I want to be clear that by reexamining *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, my goal is not to promote a notion of victimization or to create an impression that the film is about man's oppression of women. To say either of those things would not only cheapen the film, but it would also greatly oversimplify my argument. What I sought to identify in this essay is that *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* has themes of self-definition and self-liberation that are empowering for many individuals but also misleading when considered from a disadvantaged point of view. These themes, as they are portrayed in the film, cannot be applied to women because they assume that society's obstacles can always be overcome through self-definition. The idea of self-definition, however, assumes that the individual has total control over his or her identity and destiny. This is false for most people because society plays a very important part in shaping one's identity and determining one's life path. I am not saying that society necessarily comes before the individual. I am saying that the themes of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* ignore the complex relationship between the individual and society and that this leads to a simplistic view of an individual's mobility in a social context.

Reexamining *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* using feminist criticism reveals that the American myth of self-definition is exactly that: a myth, which is both unattainable and false. Although it is inspiring to believe that one can determine one's own destiny like Ferris Bueller, it is not an accurate depiction of reality because no person can be "divorced from specific social circumstances" (Baym 595). Therefore, self-definition and self-liberation cannot be applied to women, or any disadvantaged group of people, because those ideas assume that every individual has the potential to achieve "self-definition" and can "exist in some meaningful sense" outside of a society (Baym 595). Rather than using this feminist interpretation of the film to undermine its message of inner mobility, I suggest that *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* should be perceived with the knowledge that its themes cannot be applied to everyone. Furthermore, I contend that the character of Jeanie, who

appears to be a jealous adversary to Ferris, is actually a woman seeking justice in a male-dominated society. With this idea in mind, Ferris's mantra takes on a whole new meaning for those people who believe that self-liberation is possible for anyone. Privileged members of society must remember that life is filled with injustice and inequality. "If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

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Beauty in the Abyss: (De)creating Human Form in Lewis's *The Monk*

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The advent of nineteenth-century Romantic literature was inscribed in a period of cultural transition. The early emergence of Gothic fiction quickly distorted conventionalist views of sexual identity, religious upbringing, and gender roles within society. Among the twisted array of Gothic inventors is Matthew Gregory Lewis, a nineteen-year-old boy whose infamous novel, *The Monk* (1796), continues to terrify readers today. Raised in a scandalous household permeated by adultery, lust, and illegitimacy, Lewis reflects the shattered virtues of his youth onto the terrors of his own literature. Moreover, abandoned by his mother at the age of six, Lewis was plagued with a shattered identity; the instability of his home life mirrored the ambiguity of his sexual desires. Lewis became absorbed in a whirlwind of cultural change that only picked up speed as his family deteriorated before his very own eyes. However, in the midst of a transformative time period, Lewis accomplishes a truly daunting task; in *The Monk*, he captures the essence of identity by constructing a bare existence. Lewis portrays the living being as an androgynous form that exists in a desolate moral vacuum, absent of all but sexual desire. The erotic core of the individual is all that is left after the body is stripped naked of its religious, filial, and gendered garments. Lewis thus depicts life through the rhetoric of body; nakedness becomes symbolic of the physical and sexual incarnations of self. It is a rhetoric that unfolds throughout the novel, entangling earthly creatures and Satanic forms. The monk's iconic portrait of the Madonna is defiled by its inherent connection to Lucifer, thus unearthing a symbolic destruction of all religious sanctity in the novel. Furthermore, Lucifer's intrusive presence throughout the narrative strips gender from the heart of the individual while outlining the concurrence of homoerotic and heteroerotic tendencies that contribute to the rhetoric of body. Ultimately, Ambrosio is sucked into a web of incest that removes him from the conventional realm of family identity. Thus, the monk becomes a vicarious representation of Lewis himself; the moral vacuum that enfolds Ambrosio coexists with the cultural vortex that plagues Lewis, illustrating a paradox. The result is a novel that not only provokes disgust but illustrates creation as well. Through the rhetoric of body, *The Monk*, a quintessential work of Gothic fiction, unfolds as a Romantic assertion of how beauty appears in its purest form, and, more importantly, how that beauty is shattered before the world's watchful eyes.

Matthew Gregory Lewis's progression through youth is essential to his perception of beauty and its twisted manifestation in the physical world. Born in London on July 9, 1775, "Mat" was the "spoiled playmate of his

mother," Frances Maria Sewell, and the distant son of Matthew Lewis, a stringent yet distinguished man (Railo 82-83). When Matthew Gregory Lewis was only six, Sewell left her husband, along with her four young children, for a man named Samuel Harrison. The affair unfolded as Lewis's father denounced Sewell with blatant accusations of adultery and lechery. A year after eloping with Harrison, Sewell gave birth to an illegitimate child "whose identity and sex have not yet been definitely established." Despite her abrupt departure, Matthew Gregory Lewis remained emotionally closest to his mother. It was to her that he "gave his devotion and his affection" (Irwin 13). Moreover, these "affectionate relations between mother and son never altered" (Railo 83). Lewis harbored a bitter resentment toward his father, yet he continually nurtured a fondness for his mother. Matthew Lewis's petition for a divorce was denied, and thus the two remained unhappily married for the remainder of their lives. Matthew Gregory Lewis "regarded his Christian names with 'horror' and 'abomination,'" for they stemmed from his paternal side, and it was not until the publication of *The Monk* in 1796 that he gained an agreeable identity: "Monk" Lewis (Macdonald 30). Lewis thus displayed signs of the Oedipus complex; he desired to be in only his mother's company, and perhaps his consequent affection was held in the desire of removing his father from the family portrait. As Lewis entered the literary ranks, his newly acquired identity prevailed, allowing his social and sexual affinities to emerge in full form.

The contextualization of Lewis's craft illustrates a cultural transition between three consecutive centuries that questions the nature of Lewis's sexual orientation and its impact on *The Monk*. As Lewis ascended the literary ranks, the scandals of his childhood slowly dissipated; however, they were quickly replaced by episodes of gossip among prominent writers of the early nineteenth century. Lewis was renowned for being a "famously voluble conversationalist" (Malchow 16); a "species of hyphen, a man of ambiguous identity" (186); or, as Byron professed, a "good man, a clever man, but a bore" (Railo 97). Lewis talked incessantly, for "he had always dukes and duchesses in his mouth, and he was particularly fond of anyone that had a title" (98). Lewis perceived himself as a man of great status, for he had assumed the worthy title of "Monk." Byron further describes Lewis as a man "fond of the society of younger men than himself" (Macdonald 60). This statement parallels Montague Summer's explicit identification of Lewis as a homosexual in his 1938 analysis *The Gothic Quest* (as quoted by Macdonald 59). Lewis seemed to interact too intimately with his younger male companions to support a heterosexual orientation. However, his most recent biographer, Louis F. Peck, asserts that Lewis's homosexuality cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt: there is "no evidence that Lewis ever engaged in homosexual behavior" (Macdonald 64). Thus, it is more accurate to consider Lewis as a homosocial figure; perhaps he preferred non-sexual relations with fellow men, embracing his own masculinity in the company of other same-sex companions.

The mere presence of this debate illustrates a shift in culture that is essential to a complete understanding of Lewis's Gothic fiction. "In the seventeenth century, heterosexual debauchery as well as sodomy was believed to make a man effeminate"; no distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality arose until the eighteenth century, the period during which Lewis progressed through youth and adolescence (Macdonald 78). Moreover, according to Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, it was not until the nineteenth century that the "homosexual became a personage," or a recognizable figure in commonplace literature and society (as quoted by Macdonald 64). Thus, the homoerotic tendencies that emerge throughout *The Monk* are illustrative of a cultural transition, one that defines sexual orientation as a component of identity. Because "hidden--that is, disguised--sexual identity is perhaps a more common theme in early rather than late Gothic fiction," it embodies both the impetus and the progression of nineteenth-century Romantic literature (Malchow 139). Disguised sexual identity in *The Monk* establishes undertones of incest, homosexuality, and androgyny, all of which relate to fundamentally Romantic concepts concealed in the guise of Gothic perversion.

Lewis allows sexuality to permeate the fabric of the novel by establishing it as the primary governing force of the church. In describing the audience of Ambrosio's oratory, Lewis immediately notes, "the women came to show themselves- the men, to see the women" (3). The voice that initiates the story is "aggressively anti-Catholic in tone," and thus it allows sexual urges to triumph over religious institutionalization from the very beginning (Napier 125). Attendance is marked not by the conventions of faith and worship, but rather by the potential for heterosexual attraction. However, Ambrosio does not seek such attraction; a man with "no single stain upon his conscience," the monk retreats to his cell and beholds a vastly different object of affection: the portrait of the Virgin Madonna (27-28). Lewis objectifies Ambrosio's desires, for the monk declares, "It is not the woman's beauty that fills me with such enthusiasm: it is the painter's skill that I admire; it is the divinity that I adore" (28). The painting will last forever, and thus Ambrosio will be able to gratify his sexual desires for eternity.

However, Lewis unveils the monk's objective fetishism as only one element of his connection to the Madonna. Underneath Ambrosio's adoration for the female icon rests a "latent erotic component" (Brooks 257), for the Virgin represents a maternal figure as well as the object of desire in man (Andriano 35). Moreover, "since [Ambrosio's] idolatry is charged with eroticism, and the Virgin is the Mother of God, his worship has overtones of incest" (Macdonald 78). An "elaboration of the surface," or the painting, leads the reader to the depths of its sexual content, demonstrating Sedgwick's notion of repressed "inner drives" (255). There is something beyond the evocative imagery of the painting that penetrates Ambrosio's core. Hence, the painting, the "repressed object of his infantile desire,"

morphs into the "conscious object of his lust" (Jones 134). In the physical world, the painting of the Madonna delineates beauty in one dimension. However, the beauty of surfaces does not fully satisfy the monk's eroticism. As the "ultimate wish fantasy," the Madonna invades Ambrosio's dreams, and her three-dimensional form strikes nearest to reality (Andriano 44). Her nakedness enters a new dimension, gratifying Ambrosio's sexual taste for the purity of flesh:

Sometimes his dreams presented the image of his favourite Madonna, and he fancied that he was kneeling before her; as he offered up his vows to her, the eyes of the figure seemed to beam on him with inexpressible sweetness; he pressed his lips to hers, and found them warm: the animated form started from the canvas, embraced him affectionately, and his senses were unable to support delight so exquisite. Such were the scenes on which his thoughts were employed while sleeping; his unsatisfied desires placed before him the most lustful and provoking images, and he rioted in *joys till then unknown to him*. (Lewis 48, italics mine)

Lewis holds no reservation in utilizing the rhetoric of body to envision a fleshly relationship between Ambrosio and the Madonna. He is "quite explicit about the repression itself, about the sexual dreams that torment Ambrosio once Matilda has aroused his desires, and his hungry addiction to physical gratification once the barriers are broken down." MacAndrew argues that Ambrosio is "monstrously guilty" of his irreverent sexual desires, yet it seems as though his satisfaction through fantastical encounter outweighs his moral obligation to the church (88). In fact, "for the eighteenth-century Gothickist, the monastery was the quintessential repressive institution," and thus the strictness of the church seemingly normalizes Ambrosio's behavior (Ellis 146). It is only natural that his repressed desires reach the surface. However, Ambrosio soon comes to realize that the object of his lust is much farther from the iconic and blessed Virgin, and thus Mother Church, than he had ever conceived.

The Madonna's concealed connection to Lucifer shatters all religious sanctity in the novel through the mastery of guise and the construction of a deceitful veneer. Matilda, who penetrates the consecrated walls of the monastery in the guise of the male novice Rosario, brings about the monk's illness through a Genesis reconstituted in terms of sexual passion (Williams 116). As the incarnate serpent, Matilda tempts Ambrosio, the male embodiment of Eve, to pluck a rose, exhorting, "I will hide it in my bosom, and, when I am dead, the nuns shall find it withered upon my heart" (Lewis 50). Matilda's counterpart, the fleshly serpent, bites the monk, and he is ravaged by an illness of the most severe proportions: "he raved in all the horrors of delirium" and "foamed at the mouth" (51). Lewis molds the origin of man into a story of sexual creation, inverting the traditional gender roles of Adam and Eve. In the Book of Genesis, "the LORD God caused a

deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (*King James Bible*, Gen. 2.21-22). God creates Eve with the flesh of man, yet, inversely, in *The Monk*, Lucifer forms Rosario with the flesh of woman: Matilda. Thus, Lewis depicts the "Fall of man through woman and the birth of lust into the world" (MacAndrew 92). However, despite his masculine form, Ambrosio is portrayed as a woman by virtue of his parallel existence to Eve. Likewise, Matilda is portrayed as a man, for she assumes the earthly figure of the male Rosario. As Lewis only begins to strip gender from the human forms of the novel, he continues to defile religion by upholding Matilda, Lucifer's quasi-hermaphroditic fiend, as the revered Virgin Madonna.

The true identity of the Madonna is revealed only after Ambrosio succumbs to temptation and falls victims to Lucifer's ploy. It is not until the monk becomes ill that he realizes the parallel between his "nurse," Matilda, and the Virgin Madonna:

The suddenness of [Matilda's] movement made her cowl fall back from her head; her features became visible to the monk's inquiring eye. What was his amazement at beholding the exact resemblance of his admired Madonna! The same exquisite proportion of features, the same profusion of golden hair, the same rosy lips, heavenly eyes, and majesty of countenance, adorned Matilda! Uttering an exclamation of surprise, Ambrosio sank back upon his pillow, and doubted whether the object before him was mortal or divine. (Lewis 58)

Ambrosio establishes this connection by observing Matilda's sexual form and inadvertent exposure. To the monk's proclamation, Matilda responds, "yes, Ambrosio, in Matilda de Villanegas you see the original of your beloved Madonna. Soon after I conceived my unfortunate passion I formed the project of conveying to you my picture" (58). Thus, Matilda invades the monastery in objectified terms before penetrating Ambrosio's sex in her masculine guise. However, her declaration is a complete and utter lie; she did not pose for the painting of the Madonna, and the portrait was not "created in her image" (Sedgwick 261). After Ambrosio signs away his soul at the end of the novel, Lucifer reveals, "I observed your blind idolatry of the Madonna's picture. I bade a subordinate but crafty spirit assume a similar form, and you eagerly yielded to the blandishments of Matilda" (319). As the omnipotent force of the novel, Lucifer, not Matilda, offers the most compelling argument. Thus, Williams suggests, "Matilda presents herself as a twin of Ambrosio's portrait of the Madonna." The Madonna comes first in the sequence, followed by Rosario and Matilda, respectively. Consequently, Mother Church, the "most ominous, pervasive, and inescapable female presence in the novel," assumes the representation of Matilda, the feigned Virgin Madonna: Mother of God (Williams 117). Therefore, the

Matilda/Madonna conceit, as identified by Brooks, demonstrates "why God can no longer be for Ambrosio the representative of the Sacred: Spirituality has a latent daemonic content; the daemonic underlies the seemingly Holy" (258). Matilda's role as a host of daemonic torment is essential to Lewis's creation of an empty soul, and moreover, to the construction of a sacrilegious, genderless vacuum.

Who-- or better yet, *what*-- is Matilda? Is *it* simply a female who assumes the guise of the male Rosario to infiltrate the monastery? Is it an "agent of Lucifer, and not a human being at all"? (MacAndrew 91). Is it truly "a succubus as at the high point just preceding the final action of the book"? (Irwin 49). Or is it an androgynous "agent of cosmic darkness" that "earlier showed signs of humanity"? (Andriano 35). Only one individual holds the answer to this loaded question: Milton. Milton reveals, "Spirits when they please/□ Can either Sex assume, or both" (1. 423-424). Thus, Grudin notes that "theories about the incubus-succubus" can elucidate Matilda's "puzzling androgyny" (140). Conventions of demonology reveal that the incubus is the male demon "lying upon" the woman, whereas the succubus is the female demon "lying beneath" the man (141). Matilda assumes both male and female forms, which suggests that she embodies the complete incubus-succubus model. However, since Ambrosio is the only subject upon whom she acts, Lewis is proposing that the monk is an androgynous being as well. As a daemon, both incubus and succubus, Matilda represents "not a wholly other, but a complex of interdicted erotic desires" within Ambrosio (Brooks 258). If both Matilda and the monk are androgynous beings, able to morph into male and female forms, then there exists the potential for homosexual encounter. Thus, "the device of the disguise allows the author to achieve something of the sensational frisson of same-sex passion" (Malchow 139). Ambrosio can fulfill his homosocial desires in the company of Rosario, his homosexual urges in the presence of Matilda the incubus (the feigned Rosario), and his heterosexual impulses through intercourse with Matilda the succubus. A homosexual thrill is captured by Ambrosio's paternal words to Rosario:

... for never did parent watch over a child more fondly than I have watched over you. From the moment in which I first beheld you I perceived *sensations in my bosom till then unknown to me*; I found a delight in your society which no one's else could afford; and, when I witnessed the extent of your genius and information, I rejoiced as does a father in the perfections of his son. (Lewis 41, italics mine)

Once Ambrosio discovers that he is speaking not to the real Rosario, but rather to Matilda, the feigned Rosario, he becomes consumed by a paroxysm of emotion. In a sense, he "has already his sexual object, safely (physiologically) repressed," for he can no longer manifest his homosexual propensities (Napier 129). However, "he felt a secret pleasure in reflecting that a young and seemingly so lovely woman had for his sake abandoned the

world, and sacrificed every other passion to that which he had inspired" (Lewis 44). Thus, heterosexuality prevails; it is inevitable that he will engage in sexual relations with Matilda, for she has covered all bases of sexual interest through her transformation. Camille Paglia counters, the "meltingly delicious sex between Ambrosio and Matilda . . . has been homosexual and daemonic, not heterosexual" (as quoted by Andriano 35). However, the physical act of sex is performed between male and female forms, and thus Paglia's assertion is valid only in theory. Lewis constantly returns the reader "to the acceptable world of heterosexuality," later to be shattered by Lucifer's intrusions and intimations of incest (Malchow 139). Insofar as Gothic romance is concerned, Lewis threads a complex narrative of sexuality, one that he may not have intended to explain: "The *frisson* of a male novice transforming into a woman, who almost immediately rends open her garments to expose her breast and then resumes her anonymous habit and name, suggests perhaps deeper interests in sexuality than Lewis cared to confront" (Napier 129). Thus, the maelstrom of sexual desires defines the androgynous and profane, if inexplicable, world in which the monk lives: the same world that Lucifer invades.

Lucifer's dimorphic presence in the novel sustains the concepts of androgyny and eroticism while further deepening the emptiness that plagues Ambrosio's soul. Lucifer, the "fallen angel," first appears upon being summoned by Matilda in the sepulcher of St. Clare (Lewis 194). The ritual is both enigmatic and revealing, for it mirrors an earlier scene in the novel that reflects the monk's lustful attraction to Matilda. In this scene, the monk's resolute stance requiring Matilda to leave the monastery is destroyed by the revelation of her naked body. Matilda resists Ambrosio's commands, and "she lays her dagger's point against her naked bosom- and their union is heralded by an episode that symbolically associates semen and poison" (Napier 131). Matilda's features captivate the eyes and organs of Ambrosio's lust:

She had torn open her habit, and her bosom was half-exposed. The weapon's point rested upon her left breast- and, oh! That was such a breast! The moon-breasts darting full upon it enabled the monk to observe its dazzling whiteness. His eye dwelt with insatiable avidity upon the beauteous orb: a *sensation till then unknown* filled his heart with a mixture of anxiety and delight; a raging fire shot through every limb: the blood boiled in his veins, and a thousand wild wishes bewildered his imagination. (Lewis 46, italics mine)

Here, Ambrosio's erotic fascination parallels his aforementioned homosexual attraction to the feigned Rosario, as well as his heterosexual lust for the nakedness of the Virgin Madonna: all three desires provoke "a *sensation till then unknown*." Matilda openly exposes her naked body, the stimulus that elicits a sexual response in the monk similar to those induced by Rosario and the Virgin Madonna. "Lewis's culture thought of sexually aggressive women not just as masculine but as hermaphroditic," thus

reinforcing Matilda's link to androgyny and the incubus-succubus model (Macdonald 77). Ambrosio becomes fixated on the naked form, both male and female, upon first being seduced by Matilda's breast. The rush of blood that flows through his body attains a purely sexual function, and it deems him Matilda's demonic prey. Lucifer appears only after Matilda spills their shared blood in a torrent of delirium.

The monk encounters Lucifer's naked figure after witnessing Matilda's elaborate invocation of the demons. Matilda, "seized with an excess of delirium," conjures the evil spirits of Lucifer, throwing "three human fingers, and an *Agnus Dei*," into the "pale sulphurous flame" that rises from the trembling blue fire of the sepulcher. Just as the profanation of the Madonna shatters religious sanctity, the destruction of the *Agnus Dei* illustrates the desecration of Jesus, Lamb of God. The ritual reflects a sacrificial practice, for Matilda invokes Lucifer through the offering of blood. Matilda, "drawing the poniard from her girdle, plunged it into her left arm. The blood gushed out plentifully; and as she stood on the brink of the circle, she took care that it should fall on the outside. The flames retired from the spot on which the blood was pouring" (Lewis 200). Matilda draws blood from her left arm, a region of the body near her breast. The blood is not only hers, for it flows parallel to that of the monk during his sexual stimulation. Moreover, "the poison of Ambrosio's wounds [is] circulating in her veins" (Napier 131). When Ambrosio was bit by the centipede in Lewis's contrived Eden, the garden of lustful desire, Matilda "kissed the wound, and drew out the poison with [her] lips" (Lewis 63). Thus, in extracting the venom from the monk's body, Matilda engages in a transfer of bodily fluids. Lewis is insistent on describing the rush of blood that flows through Ambrosio's core, and thus the serpent's venom becomes symbolic of not only poison, but blood and semen as well. Consequently, "*The Monk* . . . moves from the monastery garden to Ambrosio's concluding inferno," awaiting the presence of Lucifer upon the sacrifice of the monk's blood (Hennelly 152-153). Stripped even of his sexual fluids and the warmth of his own blood, Ambrosio becomes a physical form living a bare existence. His nakedness is ironically sacrilegious, for although "Adam and Eve first appear gracefully unclothed," Lucifer does as well in this Gothic novel (152). Once an idol of the congregation, Ambrosio becomes a fallen beauty, and his erotic desires carry him simultaneously to the pinnacle of lust and the nadir of religious esteem.

The monk finds Lucifer's naked figure to be arousing, for it completes the sexual triad composed of his own blood. Matilda's ritual distorts the notion of Jesus, sacrificial Lamb, into Lucifer, product of sacrificial blood:

. . . he beheld a figure more beautiful than fancy's peril ever drew. It was a youth, seemingly scarce eighteen, the perfection of whose form and face was unrivalled. He was perfectly naked: a bright star sparkled upon his forehead, two crimson wings extended

themselves from his shoulders, and his silken locks were confined by a band of many-coloured fires . . . Circlets of diamonds were fastened round his arms and ankles, and in his right hand he bore a silver branch, imitating myrtle. His form shone with dazzling glory: he was surrounded by clouds of rose-coloured light; and at the moment that he appeared, a refreshing air breathed perfumes through the cavern. (Lewis 201)

Appearing as a "beautiful youth," Lucifer radiates a "chillness that paradoxically makes him more seductive" (Cavaliero 28). Shockingly, Lucifer's naked form produces the same "erotic proclivity" in the monk as the portrait of the Virgin Madonna (Sedgwick 261). "For two years [the Madonna] had been the object of his increasing wonder and adoration. He paused, and gazed upon it with delight" (Lewis 28); similarly, when first seeing Lucifer, the monk "gazed upon the spirit with delight and wonder" (201). It is the same delight and wonder that governs both reactions, and thus it is the same eroticism that springs forth from the monk's bosom. Lewis's parallelism highlights the continuity of sexual themes throughout the monk's progression, and thus when Lucifer makes his first appearance, the reader is able to relate such an omnipotent force to the major thread of the novel. Unlike the reader, Ambrosio takes note of the beautiful youth's voluptuous form, but he fails to identify Lucifer's guise. Thus, "Ambrosio's blindness symbolizes the inability of his native 'goodness' to recognize evil" (MacAndrew 92). The monk is blinded by his homosexual proclivities, and he is incapable of equating a fallen angel with a full-blown devil. The reader observes the monk as he sinks into Lucifer's deadly grasp. "The Devil is real enough," but "the mercy and grace of God remain invisible"; there is no one to save the monk from his demise, for his destruction comes from within (Cavaliero 29). Unable to be saved, the monk pursues the object of his dearest affection, an alluring yet innocent youth who embodies the fusion of homosexual, heterosexual, and hermaphroditic eroticism: Antonia.

Matilda's Satanic agency compels Ambrosio to inadvertently commit matricide and incest, for she inflames the monk's lust by forcing him upon Antonia, the only pure feminine form in the novel. Matilda seeks to intensify the monk's desires to a level beyond his control; "her interest is not in the man, but in his perdition" (Grudin 139). Thus, Matilda, Lucifer's servant and "an incubus from a literal hell," presents Antonia's image in its absolute nakedness and untarnished form (Andriano 35). Once again, the incubus, or male demon, is manifested in Matilda's "masculinized stature," and it compels the monk to "seek a 'feminine' source elsewhere in the body of Antonia" (Suehara 2). The incubus reveals Antonia's "voluptuous contours and admirable symmetry" as she throws off her last garment before bathing her naked body (Lewis 197). This scene, depicted through the darkness of the magic mirror, excites the monk's passions while foreshadowing the "incestuous enjoyment of his sister" that is soon to come (Townshend 232). Antonia raises her arms to drive the "tame linnet" from

its "delightful harbour" in her bosom, revealing her breasts to the monk's naked eye (Lewis 197). Because the vision in the magic mirror "fetishizes [Antonia's] breasts," and because breasts are "the universal synecdoche of the mother," Lewis establishes undertones of incest marked by the coalescence of brother, sister, and mother (Jones 134). Thus, Lewis begins to manipulate the conventions of family identity, allowing the monk to approach matricide and incest as he comes closer and closer to Antonia's naked form.

However, Lewis treats Antonia differently than the monk's other sexual interests. The Madonna, the incubus (Rosario), and the succubus (Matilda) represent the monk's objectified, homosexual, and heterosexual desires, respectively. Where does this leave Antonia? The answer lies within Lewis's subtle parallelism and hidden rules of sexuality. Each of the three aforementioned figures provoked in Ambrosio "*a sensation till then unknown*"; Antonia does not. Rather, quite the opposite is true: upon first sight, the monk provoked in Antonia "*a pleasure fluttering in her bosom which till then had been unknown*" (Lewis 11). Thus, Antonia is drawn, heterosexually, to the monk's illustrious form. Lewis reverses the force of attraction, suggesting that the monk becomes the seducer rather than the seduced. Although the monk is unable to resist his three tempters, Antonia holds the capacity to defy Ambrosio's sexual advances. Perhaps it is her natural instinct to resist, for although she is unaware of their consanguinity, the blood relationship they share runs deep in her veins. Nonetheless, after being corrupted by the demon Matilda, the monk lacks this capacity to resist and conceives Antonia's purity "only as something to be despoiled"; thus, Antonia becomes the Madonna incarnate (Brooks 259). The monk will possess Antonia for eternity just as he possesses the Madonna, but for a different reason. Ambrosio violates the virgin youth's innocence, yet "in raping Antonia, he causes her death and guarantees his eternal damnation" (Napier 132). Antonia is stripped of her proper narrative: she loses her mother, her brother rapes her, and she has no chance of salvation. Lorenzo, her knight in shining armor, does not rescue her and take her to a far-away land to "live happily ever after" (Jones 138). Thus, "seduction is inevitably destruction," a realization that holds true not only for Antonia, but for Ambrosio as well (Brooks 259). Upon being raped, Antonia is condemned to suffer the same fate as the monk; hence, "Antonia's body serves to emblemize her brother's subsequent demise" (Suyehara 3). Doomed to perdition, Ambrosio punishes his creator and seeks a new redeemer, only to sink further into the depths of despair.

Lewis returns to the monk's birth and the origin of his creation to establish a parallel between his two contrasting states of nakedness, each fostered by a single creature in the novel. Elvira, Ambrosio's mother and earthly procreator, brings the monk's naked form into the world of innocence. Despite her over-protectiveness toward her daughter, Antonia, Elvira is by no means a "good woman," for she abandons Ambrosio, leaving

his naked body exposed to the sins of the world (Williams 116). Moreover, Elvira's vigilance becomes a barrier to the monk's sexual conquest of Antonia; thus, "with one hand he grasped Elvira's throat so as to prevent her continuing her clamour . . . and pressing his knee upon her stomach . . . endeavored to put an end to her existence" (Lewis 220). By allowing the monk to commit matricide, Lewis enables him to rape his sister, and, eventually, adopt a new father: Lucifer. However, Lucifer does not appear in the guise of a seraph as before, but rather in "all that ugliness which, since his fall from heaven, had been his portion":

His blasted limbs still bore marks of the Almighty's thunder. A swarthy darkness spread itself over his gigantic form: his hands and feet were armed with long talons. Fury glared in his eyes, which might have struck the bravest heart with terror. Over his huge shoulders waved two enormous sable wings; and his hair was supplied by living snakes, which twined themselves round his brows with frightful hissings. (314)

Lucifer's ghastly form does not sexually arouse the monk, as did the naked guise of the archangel. Now, Ambrosio acts only in desperation; the pressures of the Inquisition allow the prospect of salvation to triumph over sexual gratification. To wholly establish the father-son bond that Ambrosio equates with deliverance, Lucifer strikes an iron pen "into a vein of the monk's left hand" (315), sucking the blood with which Ambrosio signs the "fatal contract," at last selling away his soul (317). Thus, Lewis constructs a new form of nakedness; deprived of religion, gender, family, and soul, the monk is nothing more than a bare corpse surrounded by the emptiness of the world around him. Lucifer, the triumphant father and the possessor of Ambrosio's blood, releases the corpse into the abyss, forever sealing the monk's eternal damnation.

Lewis mentions the abyss only at the conclusion of the novel, when, in reality, it is present all along. The abyss represents not only the moral vacuum that hosts the inevitable reign of Lucifer, but also the void that consumes Lewis's own personal life. Just as Elvira abandoned the monk, Lewis's mother fled when he was only six. Just as the monk's sexual drives were torn between men and women, Lewis's urges wavered on the edge of homosexuality and homosociality. Lewis was plagued by a never-ending state of confusion; he was unable to establish a concrete identity that defined him as an individual, and thus he assumed the title of "Monk" Lewis, reflecting his own self in Ambrosio. Ambrosio is Adam, experiencing his fall. Ambrosio is Satan, undergoing his expulsion from heaven. Ambrosio is the ultimate decreation (Napier 125). Ironically, in depicting Ambrosio's bare existence, Lewis acquires the despairing monk's essence, becoming the ultimate (de)creator.

In contriving Ambrosio's narrative while constructing his own identity, Lewis strips the monk to his most naked form. This paradox illustrates Lewis's assertion that (de)creation underlines the Romantic

sublime. Lewis recognizes that "nature permits everything and authorizes nothing. The only principle inherent in nature is in fact destruction, and desire is both inflamed and frustrated by the recurrent discovery that its illogical outcome is destruction" (Brooks 260). Thus, through destruction, Lewis brings the reader closer to nature and its impact on man. Nature becomes a "source of despair, for in its mirror we ultimately discover our own death and decomposition." Antonia, an incarnation of Eden's perfection and nature's ideal state, becomes a fallen idol. Raped and profaned by the libidinous monk, she represents "the impossibility of the existence of purity, incorruption, [and] immutability" in nature. Even Ambrosio, one of God's "best creations," is destined to "defilement, corruption, loss of innocence, and erotic desire" (261). The monk suffers the same fate as Antonia, for after Lucifer releases him into the abyss, his "bruised and mangled" body mirrors Antonia's violated corpse (Lewis 320). The decaying corpses come to represent how nature permits destruction; however, fallen beauty only strengthens the sublime, for it suggests a beauty that once was: a beauty that existed contrary to nature's destructive path. Thus, Lewis approaches Romanticism in a way that defines the Gothic mode while illustrating a major cultural transformation.

Lewis invokes the supernatural for a reason far beyond his own search for identity. Lewis takes the monk, the epitome of religious order, strips him of his gender, and forces him to have sex with a hermaphroditic demon, rape his sister, murder his mother, and sell his soul to Lucifer. Why does Lewis include such "Gothic bosh or absurd machinery" to establish a rhetoric of body, where nakedness becomes symbolic of both creation and decreation? (Hennelly 147). When all that will remain is a naked corpse consumed by a desolate moral vacuum, why go to such great lengths to depict the lust and sins of the monk? Lewis's reasoning is by nature romantic, for "the involvement of the reader's imagination is central to the Gothic endeavor" (Hume 284). However, Gothic writers "have no faith in the ability of man to transcend or transform [everyday life] imaginatively." Thus, as opposed to the "more profoundly 'true' reality" that mainstream Romantics depict by invoking imagination, Gothic writers create a more absurd unreality by linking imagination to the supernatural. This "involvement of the reader in a more than rational way" demonstrates the Gothic reaction against conformity and reason (289). Thus, Lewis's novel becomes a polemic against the Enlightenment (Andriano 43), built within an "imaginative framework." His fictional world is a reaction against the traditional eighteenth-century novel of manners (Brooks 253). When stripped to its barest level, *The Monk* is a clear representation of Gothic form, and it has much to contribute to the emerging Romantic Movement.

Lewis composes body rhetoric with supernatural origins yet natural implications. Behind Lewis's paranormal machinery lie Romantic ideals of the sublime and imaginative creation.

Plagued by sexual confusion and religious inversion, the monk and the victims of his desires, all naked of life, are the only true representations of beauty: "the wonders of sublimity" are evoked only through the "transgression of all legal and aesthetic limits" (Townshend 240). Lewis recognizes the need for inversion, as does Coleridge. In discussing his role in crafting the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge asserts, "my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural . . . so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (as quoted by Hume 284). The dialectical relationship between disbelief and imagination represents the constant struggle faced by both Gothic and mainstream Romantic writers. Lewis leaves the reader with the corpses of Antonia and Ambrosio but does not explain the significance of their naked bodies. Thus, *The Monk* remains entirely discordant: Lewis does not resolve elements of sexual confusion, offer a mechanism to repress desire, or elaborate on the emotional implications of matricide and incest. Paradoxes remain paradoxes; contradictions remain contradictions: Lewis provides no answers. In contrast, "Romantic writing reconciles the discordant elements it faces, resolving their apparent contradictions imaginatively in the creation of a high order" (Hume 290). Hence, unlike Antonia, the poet in Shelley's "Alastor" finds a world where purity, incorruption, and immutability are indeed possible. Thus, Romantic writers progress on a linear path toward creation; imagination leads to an ideal state. In contrast, Gothic writers retrogress on the same linear path toward (de)creation; imagination allows the reader to envision an ideal state that has since fallen as a result of supernatural forces. Although Romanticism and Gothicism advance in opposite directions, they inevitably share the same path.

What began as a search for Lewis's own identity quickly transformed into a narrative that now defines the role of Gothicism in nineteenth century Romantic literature. Although Lewis contrives the narrative, there is a sense of rawness left at the novel's conclusion that makes it seem incredibly real and palpable. Lewis's body rhetoric reveals the stark nakedness of two forms: Ambrosio and Antonia. He characterizes both individuals as sublime figures at the start of the novel yet treats neither as such at the novel's end. Antonia is the same innocent youth at opposite extremes of the novel; she commits no crime. However, as the victim of her brother's rape, her body is defiled, her persona disparaged. The monk's illicit sexual encounters create an overwhelming disgust in the mind of the reader that is only intensified by his willingness to rape and murder innocent women. Nonetheless, when the reader should feel sympathy for Antonia, he/she is preoccupied by the grotesqueries that reflect Lewis's own life. Nature, or rather, nature's destruction, is present throughout. It is the task of the reader to search deeper than the surface, to identify the repressed inner drives that govern the novel, and to use imagination to resurrect the beauty

of two fallen idols. Beauty is not religion, nor gender, nor family; it is the body's essence, the state of being that receives life from nature, and, perhaps more importantly, the state of being that, at any time, has the potential to be destroyed by the very same forces of its own creation.

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